April, 1986 $1.95 U.S./$2.25 Can.

ALFRED HITCHCOCK's MYSTERY MAGAZINE

10 SUSPENSEFUL SHORT STORIES BY
Bill Crenshaw
Jeffry Scott
Gary Alexander
and others

plus THE WINNERS OF THE SPECIAL HITCHCOCK CONTEST

0 02646 04
387165

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"A NEW WRITER WHO GOES RIGHT FOR THE JUGULAR."*

BENJAMIN M. SCHUTZ

A NEW LEO HAGGERTY THRILLER

ALL THE OLD BARGAINS

TRADE HARDCOVER $13.95 ISBN: 0-312-94014-9
SEPTEMBER RELEASE

Already Published:

"A TAUT THRILLER."*

"First person narration keeps the mystery gripping. Schutz, a clinical psychologist displays in his first novel a fine understanding of the psychotic criminal mind."
–Publishers Weekly

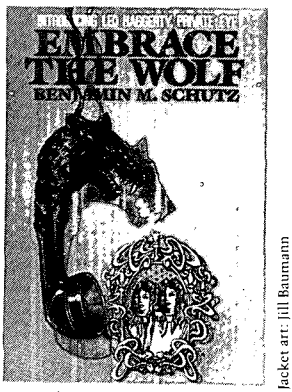
EMBRACE THE WOLF

TRADE HARDCOVER $13.95 ISBN: 0-312-94137-4

■ Get a letter from Leo Haggerty, write dept. LH1

*OCALA STAR-BANNER (FLA)

Jacket art: Jill Baumann



Jacket art: Jill Baumann

Bluejay Books Inc.
1123 Broadway, Suite 306
New York, NY 10010
Distributed by St. Martin's Press in the U.S.A. and by Methuen Publications in Canada

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

CONTENTS

SHORT STORIES

HOW I SPENT MY HOLIDAY by Jeffrey Bush 6
THE HAUNTED CHAIR by Stephen F. Wilcox 20
THE HOLDUP by Stephen Wasylyk 29
MAGWITCH RETURNS by John Nelson 46
WORLD ENOUGH AND TIME by Bill Crenshaw 56
A TOUCH OF SILVER by Jeffry Scott 90
SURPRISE by Gary Alexander 106
MYSTERY OF THE CHINESE BALL by Jim Ingraham 116
SOMEONE OUGHTA by Bill Bickel 127

MYSTERY CLASSIC

THE GREAT CIPHER by Melville Davisson Post 134

DEPARTMENTS

EDITOR'S NOTES 2
THE MYSTERIOUS PHOTOGRAPH 55
UNSOLVED by Jerome Meyer 89
SOLUTION TO THE MARCH "UNSOLVED" 133
BOOKED & PRINTED by Mary Cannon 150
MURDER BY DIRECTION by Peter Shaw 153
THE STORY THAT WON 155

ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE Vol. 31, No. 4, April, 1986. Published 13 times a year, every 28 days, by Davis Publications, Inc., at $1.95 per copy in the U.S.A., $2.25 in Canada. Annual subscription $19.50 in the U.S.A. and possessions; $23.00 elsewhere payable in advance in U.S. funds. Allow 6 to 8 weeks for change of address. Editorial and Executive Offices, 380 Lexington Ave., N.Y., N.Y. 10017. Subscription orders and mail regarding subscriptions should be sent to P.O. Box 1932, Marion, O. 43305. **Call (614)383-3141 with questions regarding your subscription.** Second class postage paid at New York, N.Y., and at additional mailing office. Canadian 3rd class postage paid at Windsor, Ontario.

© 1986 by Davis Publications, Inc., all rights reserved. Protection secured under the Universal Copyright Convention. Reproduction or use without express permission of editorial or pictorial content in any manner is prohibited. Printed in U.S.A. All submissions must be accompanied by stamped self-addressed envelope; the Publisher assumes no responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts.

POSTMASTER: Send Form 3579 to Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine, P.O. Box 1932, Marion, Ohio 43305. In Canada return to 628 Monmouth Rd., Windsor, Ontario N8Y3L1. **ISSN: 0002-5224.**

Cover by Mark Gotbaum

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

EDITOR'S NOTES

by Cathleen Jordan

Our November issue, as many readers will recall, carried a special feature—a Special Hitchcock Contest—in which participants were asked to answer correctly five objective questions about Alfred Hitchcock's life and work, to supply an alternate title for one of his movies, and to come up with a concluding line for a limerick about him.

The entries are now in and the contest winners have been named! They—and their answers—are listed below, but first, for the benefit of those who might have missed one of the objective questions, let us run through those, briefly, beginning with Part 1.

A. The plot devices given in the question (the wine bottle in *Notorious,* etc.) were ones Hitchcock called "MacGuffins."

B. Hitchcock himself drew his famous profile.

C. "The Funeral March of a Marionette," the theme song for *Alfred Hitchcock Presents,* was composed by Charles-Francois Gounod. (Only the last name was required.)

D. The star in question was John Forsythe (in "I Saw the Whole Thing," aired on October 11, 1962). Many people thought the answer was Barbara Bel Geddes, by the way ("Lamb to the Slaughter," April 13, 1958), a good choice *except* that Ms. Bel Geddes starred in an episode from *Alfred Hitchcock Presents, not* in one from *The Alfred Hitchcock Hour,* as the question specified.

E. The dilemma of Hitchcock's cameo appearance in *Lifeboat* was that all the action took place, literally, in a lifeboat—a difficult place for the director to make a walk-on appearance! He solved the problem by having his photograph appear in a weight-loss advertisement in a newspaper one of the actors was reading.

In Part 2, A, the Hitchcock movie was *North by Northwest.*

Participants had to answer correctly all of the above before their replies to the rest of the contest were judged. The re-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

From the Perry Mason, Hercule Poirot and Nero Wolf whodunits to Dick Francis thrillers and the immortal James Bond...

Track down ALL the best-selling hard-to-find Mystery and Suspense you're after... in low-cost paperbacks.

If you crave the excitement and adventure of good mystery and suspense but hate waiting in line to buy your favorites...If you buy a lot but hate to pay expensive hardcover prices...If you want them all but don't want to join a book club ...It's time you discovered the **other** way to buy the bestsellers. A way that's quick, convenient and easy on your pocketbook—The Shop-At-Home Mystery and Suspense Paperback Catalog!

Over 700 Titles to choose from!

If you shopped for months you'd never find the 100's of bestsellers you find in minutes in The Shop-At-Home Mystery and Suspense Paperback Catalog. Agatha Christie, Ngaio Marsh, P.D. James, Rex Stout, Erle Stanley Gardner, Ellery Queen...all the best mystery, suspense and adventure storytellers. Not just one or two of an author's titles, but everything in print! And the largest selection of popular adult mystery and suspense available. Over 700 titles in all, from hard-to-find to soon-to-be released. All in the most inexpensive paperback editions!

Having The Shop-At-Home Mystery and Suspense Paperback Catalog is like having the bookstore come to you. Not just any bookstore. But one that specializes in hair-raising thrillers! And unlike high pressure clubs there are no catches or rules. You buy any number of books when **you** want to buy them. No "automatic shipments" of books you never ordered but have to pay for!

Easy ordering, fast delivery!

Ordering from The Shop-At-Home Mystery and Suspense Paperback Catalog is easy. You can charge books by mail or over the phone (for even speedier service). No waiting on out-of-stock titles ...our giant inventory ensures prompt delivery. Right to your door, of course. And you pay only a minimum handling charge for the luxury of shopping at home—unhurried and hassle-free.

How to Order your Shop-At-Home Catalog Right Away.

To receive The Shop-At-Home Mystery and Suspense Catalog, send $1.00 with the coupon below. Then sit back and prepare for excitement in the comfort of your armchair...at prices you can always afford. Shopping at home for bestsellers. Once you've tried it, you'll find there is no other way.

☐ I want to shop at home for best-selling mystery and suspense at low paperback prices! Rush me The Shop-At-Home Mystery and Suspense Paperback Catalog. I've enclosed $1.00 to cover postage and handling.

☐ Send me all five Shop-At-Home Paperback Catalogs —Mystery and Suspense, Western, Sci-Fi, Romance, and Fiction/Non-Fiction. I've enclosed $2.00 to cover postage and handling.

Name_____

Address_____

City_____ State_____ Zip_____

Mail coupon to:

BOOK MAILING SERVICE
Box 690 Dept. EQ-4
Rockville Center, NY 11571

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

maining two items, as indicated above, consisted of thinking up another title for *North by Northwest* and supplying a last line for the following limerick:

"Good evening," he'd say with a smile
As he filled in that rotund profile,
"Tonight's special show
Will amuse you I know,

To both there were a number of clever answers. The judges, however, after a lengthy struggle—and a lot of fun! —have awarded the prizes as follows:

First Prize ($300):

Rush More, With Feeling
"And the reruns will earn me a pile."
Barry Ergang, Rosemont, Pennsylvania

Second Prize ($200):

Rushmore Roulette
"Like the charm of a starved crocodile."
Selma Ellis, Glenview, Illinois

Third Prize ($100):

How Grant Took Rushmore
"No one's nice, no one lives—that's my style."
Arthur P. Cosing, Jr., Arlington, Virginia

But since this wasn't easy, some honorable mentions have also been selected. Kudos, therefore, for:

Face Chase
"We've murder and mayhem quite vile."
Larry Goldstein, Pearl City, Hawaii

Doom at the Top
"Like fine wine, you'll be 'chilled' in high style."
Charlotte L. Carney, Columbus, Ohio

Do *Rush*more, *Darling!*
"You'll simply die laughing—in style!"
Cathleen Coleman Walden, Franklin, Louisiana

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Pursuit of Scrappiness
"The commercials you'll find rather vile."
William F. Smith, Garden Grove, California

Up the Down Stoneface
"But making flesh crawl is *my* style."
Bill Stone, New Orleans, Louisiana

Carried Across America
"Also startle, astound, and beguile."
Lorna M. Hardy, Salt Lake City, Utah

The judges also especially liked the following titles:

R.O.T. of Ages, Matt Peddecord, Oakland, California

On the Face of the Nation, Alan Martin, Park Ridge, Illinois

Seeking a Federal Grant, Frances M. Grosse, Marlboro, Massachusetts

A Hitch in the Directions, Beverly Herald, Owensboro, Kentucky

Cary Gets Cropped, Jim Weaver, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Take No Saint for Granted, Patrick Scaffetti, Coral Springs, Florida

Congratulations to the winners—and our thanks to everyone who participated!

Cathleen Jordan, Editor; **Lois Adams,** Managing Editor; **Brian Cox,** Editorial Assistant; **Ralph Rubino,** Art Director; **Gerry Hawkins,** Associate Art Director; **Ron Kuliner,** Art Editor; **Marianne Weldon,** Associate Designer; **Sheila Smith,** Art Assistant; **Carl Bartee,** Director of Manufacturing; **Carole Dixon,** Production Manager; **Valerie Bartlett,** Production Assistant; **Cynthia Manson,** Director, Subsidiary Rights; **Florence Eichin,** Manager, Contracts & Permissions; **Louise Mugar,** Circulation Director, Retail Marketing; **James R. Caulkins,** Circulation Planning Director; **Priscilla Garston,** Circulation Director, Subscriptions; **Irene Bozoki,** Classified Advertising Director; **Jamie Fillon,** Advertising Manager; **William F. Battista,** Advertising Director
(New York: 212-557-9100; Chicago: 312-346-0712; Los Angeles: 213-785-3114).

Joel Davis, President & Publisher; **Leonard F. Pinto,** Vice President & General Manager; **Fred Edinger,** Vice President, Finance; **Paula Collins,** Vice President, Circulation.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

How I Spent My Holiday

by Jeffrey Bush

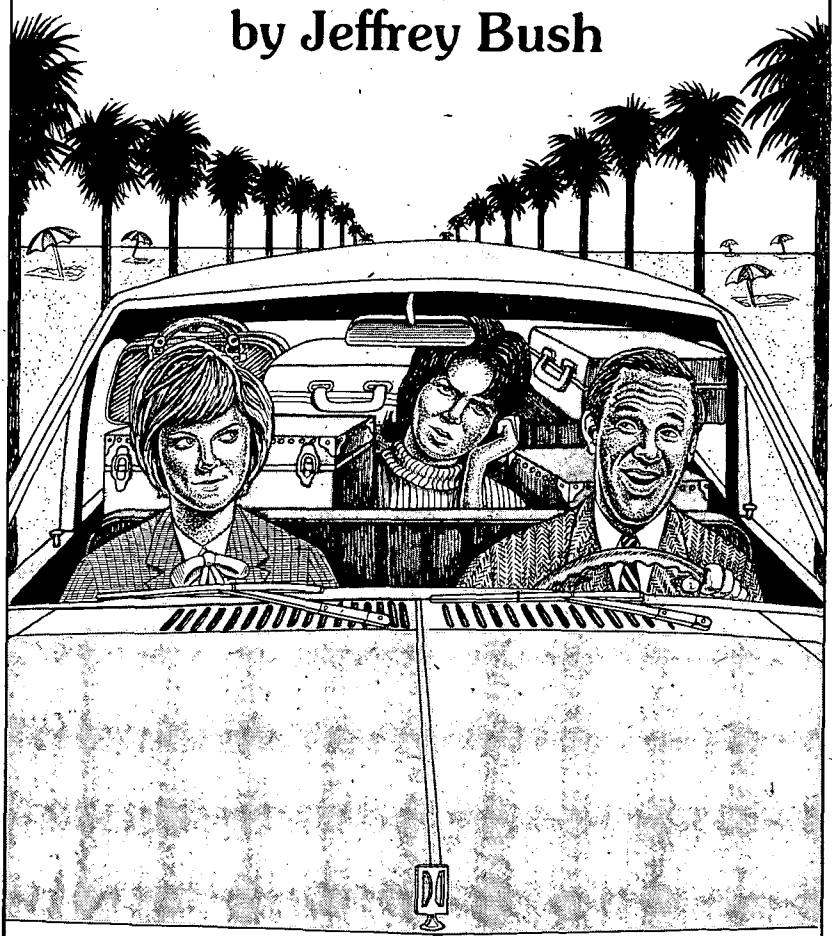


Illustration by Peter D. Fasolino

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Well, the first thing that went wrong was that Herbie, that is, my husband, was unable to find exactly where the beach cottage was.

"Maybe it's down the road," I said politely from the back seat of our car where I was sitting with some of the suitcases, shopping bags, hat boxes, etc., which Bunny, that is, my husband's secretary, had brought with her for the weekend which the three of us were going to spend in the cottage that Herbie had rented from somebody he knew at the office but had evidently forgotten the location of. "That road marked Beach Road."

"Don't be silly," he said, turning the steering wheel irritably in the opposite direction. "I know this place."

"He knows this place," Bunny said tensely, shaking her ash blonde hair which she was going to have to be careful not to get too wet or it was going to change color. "Don't bother him."

"Don't bother me," Herbie went on, stepping on the gas with a roar. "I checked out this whole area."

"He checked out this whole area, for God's sake," Bunny continued, giving me a savage glare from the front seat. She seemed to think for some reason the whole thing was my fault.

I made no reply, for I knew, of course, the purpose for which Herbie had arranged this holiday by the seashore. We sped down the road marked Bear Head Point, which seemed increasingly underpopulated by any houses, people, signs of civilization, etc., plus bumpy, especially in the back seat where it looked as if one of Bunny's shopping bags might fall to the floor and have its fragile contents of tints, conditioners, and other beauty aids crushed by a bouncing suitcase, until we reached a point where Herbie could go no farther, being faced on three sides by the Atlantic Ocean.

"Jesus Christ," he remarked between clenched teeth, wrenching the wheel around once more to retrace our footsteps, if that is a word that can be applied to our seven-year-old Oldsmobile Cutlass which has wheels, strictly speaking, instead of feet. But that is a problem I have had since the eighth grade when I was taught English by Mr. Hurlbut and discovered my gift for vivid description and poetic figures of speech, a talent I have not had much chance to exercise, unfortunately, during exactly three years of marriage to Herbie, who does not share my interest in literature.

So we drove violently back down the road marked Bear Head Point, and coming to a halt beside a youth on a bicycle, found that that was where we were, i.e., on Bear Head Point, a fact that did not surprise me greatly but seemed to throw the occupants of the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

front seat into a cold fury. They became particularly rigid as we turned down Beach Road, as if daring me to comment, which naturally I did not, being the soul of courtesy when others have shown themselves to be the idiots they originally accused the person of being who was actually right all along.

"Well, here we are," I declared brightly, as Herbie pulled up beside a cottage with a cute little front porch and a few blades of grass growing in the sand around it, proving clearly that I was not in the least exhausted, annoyed, unsettled, etc., by our five-hour drive, the last three-quarters of an hour of which had been totally unnecessary.

"God," Bunny stated, surveying our home for the next three days and two nights. "How are we going to fit into that little dump?"

"Shut up and bring in the bags," Herbie replied in a tone which he often employed to me but which I was interested to observe he occasionally used to his devoted secretary as well.

So Bunny and I brought in the bags while the leader of our expedition inspected the premises, pointing out to us which room was the kitchenette, bathroom, etc., although this was obvious to anyone but a blind person.

"Where do I sleep?" inquired his office mate, kicking off her spike heels and standing on her rather large feet in what he had identified as the sitting room because it contained a dilapidated sofa.

"In there," the decision-maker responded. He jerked his thumb towards the larger of the two bedrooms, thinking as always of the comfort of his professional associate.

"Jesus," she commented in the same religious strain she had pursued for most of the day and, picking up her assorted bags and boxes, disappeared into her bedroom, probably in order to start unpacking her expensive belongings, slamming the door shut with her stockinged heel.

"Well," said my husband. He looked around uncomfortably, now that we were alone for the first time in six hours.

"Warm, isn't it?" I remarked, fanning myself delicately with the TV magazine I had brought to while away the journey.

His gaze fell on the azure ocean, sparkling in the afternoon sun, which could be seen through the two sitting room windows and the screen door, which was swinging open in the breeze, its spring being broken and the last person through having neglected to close it. "Say," he said. His disorganized and somewhat sweaty face began to come together in a single expression. He looked at his watch. "It's almost four o'clock."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Is that so?" I said interestedly, always ready to assist my partner in life in an attempt to communicate, even on the simplest level.

He looked at me carefully, as though figuring out how to frame his next thought in actual words.

"You could go in swimming."

"Swimming?" I said.

"That's right," he said. He seemed to be having trouble speaking in a normal voice instead of yelling, his usual form of conversation. "This is the time when you can go in swimming."

"It is?"

"Yeah."

There was a pause. He wiped a strand of black hair from his perspiring brow. In her room Bunny appeared to be trying to pull open a bureau drawer.

"What do you mean," I said, "this is the time when you can go in swimming?"

He looked at the floor in an embarrassed manner.

"Well, there's a sort of drawback to this place."

Suffice it to say that I was not overcome with shock at this news.

"No kidding."

"You can only go in swimming at high tide," he said uneasily.

"At high tide?"

"The rest of the time there's this undertow. That's what the fellow told me."

"What fellow?"

"The fellow who rented me this place, for God's sake," he said impatiently, the strain of uttering one consecutive sentence after another beginning to tell on him. "You can only go in swimming at high tide. Which is at four seventeen. I looked it up."

"Why?"

"Oh my God." He raised his eyes to the heavens, or in this case the rafters, which had clamshells glued on them for decoration except where they had fallen off.

"I'm just trying to understand—"

"I'm just trying to tell you," he shouted, "if you'd stop arguing."

"I'm not arguing."

"I looked it up in the goddamn newspaper. High tide is at four seventeen this afternoon."

"I see," I said with composure.

"Which is when you can go in swimming."

"Why didn't you say so?"

"I *did* say so."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I think I'll put on my bathing suit," I said gently. It is sad to see one's husband unable to control himself.

In the small bedroom I donned my new bathing costume, observing that I needed to lose two or three pounds but consoling myself with the fact that this was early in the season. Returning to the sitting room, I discovered that the other two-thirds of our trio were unchanged, i.e., still fully dressed, which in Bunny's case was understandable, Mother Nature having endowed her with little more than skin and bones.

"Not going in?" I inquired pleasantly.

"I guess not," she replied, staring at her pointed fingernails.

"This is your only chance," I said, "on account of the undertow."

"I know," she answered, still avoiding my sociable gaze.

Herbie produced a forced grin. "Bunny and I will straighten up the place."

"Okay," I said lightheartedly, the only person present who seemed to be enjoying herself.

He looked at me in a peculiar, fixed way.

"Well," he said, "so long."

Pulling my towel around my front, I tripped gaily down the somewhat rickety front steps, leaving my fellow vacationers behind me. A few hundred yards brought me to the edge of the foaming billows, actually rather small as billows go but falling with soothing regularity on the glistening sand where I stood lulled by the delightful sights and sounds, allowing the cares of city life to slip from my lissome shoulders, not to mention the woes of a marriage which it would take a stretch of the imagination to call barely successful but which I might yet be able to salvage by a combination of hard work, loving tenderness, and patient understanding, considering the fact that Herbie had thought up this weekend for me.

"Hi."

I spun around, noting simultaneously that I was not altogether free from the stresses of everyday existence and that a rather attractive young man with no shirt on was standing behind me.

"Christ!" I exclaimed, and bit my lip, deeply mortified to learn that when taken by surprise I sounded exactly like my companions.

"You're not going in swimming, are you?"

I closed my eyes, giddy with the realization of how close I had come to demanding, "Why the hell not?" in a typical, wise-ass, city-chick fashion.

"Why not?"

"Because of the undertow."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

My interlocutor did not appear to have a complete grasp of the situation.

"That's why," I explained.

"It's at high tide."

There was some kind of mix-up here.

"There's an undertow? At high tide?"

"The rest of the time it's all right."

Suddenly everything became plain. I laughed liltingly.

"Well," I remarked, "that's my husband for you."

"Your husband?"

Already I was visualizing the scene when I went back to the cottage and indicated the true state of affairs to him.

"He gets everything wrong."

"In half an hour it'll be fine," my Good Samaritan said. "If you want to stick around."

There was a significant overtone, as it were, to his tone. It came to me that in my first start of alarm my towel had fallen away from the front of my bathing suit. I.e., sex was at work again, as it so often is.

"I've got to get back," I said regretfully. When one is pointing out a husband's errors, it is best to strike while the iron is hot.

"My name's Mike. I'm in the next cottage, with this other fellow and his girl." My new friend paused. "I had a girl, too. But at the last minute she couldn't come."

Our eyes met after this exchange of information about the living arrangements in our two cottages.

"Well," I said innocently, "have a nice day."

As I entered the sitting room, Herbie and Bunny desisted from their so-called straightening up, an enterprise in which they did not seem to have gotten very far. Bunny looked at me. Herbie cleared his throat.

"Back already?" he said hoarsely.

"Strangely enough." I deposited the towel on a ratty wicker chair with casual grace. "Seeing as how it's a miracle I'm back at all."

"What?"

"You made a small mistake about the undertow."

"I did?"

"It's *now* when it's bad."

"Is that right?"

"I could have been swept out to sea," I said. "For good."

He passed a hand over his face. He was trembling slightly, no doubt a result of having driven back and forth to Bear Head Point.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Imagine that," he said weakly.

"Luckily," I went on, "I met someone who told me about it."

Bunny had her fingers clenched, which must have been painful in view of her fingernails. She unclenched them. "Yeah," she said, transferring her stare to her chief, "that is lucky."

"I can't think of everything," he said, turning on her ferociously. "Can I?"

They appeared to be overlooking the detail that I was the central figure of this narrow escape.

"Someday," I remarked calmly to Herbie, "one of your little mistakes is going to be fatal."

And on this note I exited with simple dignity into our bedroom.

Emerging ten minutes later, I found the holiday-makers about to drive into town.

"To get some things," my better half said, jingling the car keys sullenly.

"What things?"

"Groceries."

"I'll come along," I said graciously, having decided to forgive him.

"You stay here," he snapped. "And tidy things up."

I had been unaware of this passion for neatness, not expressed until our arrival at the cottage. But, I reflected, perhaps he and Bunny were engaged on a secret errand, i.e., one I was not supposed to know about.

"All right," I said obligingly.

After backing out of the driveway with some difficulty, to avoid the stone wall on the other side of Beach Road, they departed, and I passed an agreeable hour reading my TV magazine and wondering idly whether fate would throw me once more into the path of our handsome neighbor. When they returned, bearing two large paper bags, I remained tactfully on the sofa.

"Well, Jesus," Bunny said, coming in from the kitchenette, "you could at least help me put the junk away."

Poor Bunny. Obviously it was a strain for her to be the third person in this festive party.

We had supper at a Chinese restaurant where my comrades forked food grimly into their mouths, with an occasional clipped demand for this or that, while I conversed wittily for all, wielding my chopsticks with dainty skill.

Next morning, after a refreshing slumber, I wondered if it was

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

not Bunny's task to make breakfast, being a paid employee of my husband and therefore, in a sense, of me besides, but concluded it would be more generous to do so myself. Which turned out to be just as well when she stumbled into the kitchenette with wild hair and puffy eyes, a shadow of her Ms. Glamor-and-Efficiency self.

"Sleep well?" I inquired.

"Goddamn waves kept me awake all night," she mumbled, sinking into a chair in front of the table, which folded down from the wall on one hinge, the other being missing.

"Hi there," I said kindly as her boss tottered in to join her. For this, after all, was The Day.

"Uh," he replied.

Having served eggs, bacon, etc., from the gas stove, which had to be lighted by hand, that is, with about fifty wooden matches from a box placed there for that purpose, I sat down opposite the rising executive and his Gal Friday.

"What'll we do this morning?" I asked after signs began to appear on their faces that they were going to live for another day.

"Well," Herbie said, testing his powers of speech.

Bunny held a cigarette in her hand, the first of her two packs a day. "Anybody got a light?" she asked, looking around.

"I've got an idea," Herbie said. An expression of dawning intelligence was coming into his unshaved features. He consulted his digital watch which he regards as the latest thing, unaware that other men no longer wear them. "Why don't we take a walk?"

"Yeah," Bunny echoed, turning her face away to blow out smoke so I could not read her thoughts, if any. "Why don't you take a walk?"

"Why should I take a walk?" I demanded.

"Because," Herbie said. He seemed to realize that this was not enough. "This is a good time for a walk."

"Yeah," Bunny said, "that's right."

Herbie got up from the table and, carrying his coffee cup awkwardly, went into the sitting room, a trip of about two and a half steps. "You see that little bunch of rocks out there?" he said, squinting his eyes to look out at the dazzling water.

"What little bunch of rocks?"

"You can't see it from in there," he said, "for God's sake."

I rose reluctantly, being a believer in the equality of the sexes and unwilling to be pushed around from one place to another, but there appeared to be no help for it if I was going to look at this stupid bunch of rocks.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Where?" I said, moving half into the sitting room but not all the way.

"There," he said loudly, jiggling his coffee cup so that some of his coffee and milk splashed on the rather threadbare rug. "That little bunch of rocks with the light on it."

"It doesn't look like a light."

"It's a light at night," he shouted. "Goddamn it."

"I see," I said sweetly.

"You can walk out to it on that sandbar."

I could see there was a sort of strip of sand going out to the bunch of rocks he was talking about. It went a long way out. Also, waves were sort of washing around it.

"It's a feature of this place," he went on. "You walk out and stand on the rocks."

"That's right," Bunny said.

"You see up and down the whole coastline."

"Yeah."

"You guys are just—" Trying to get me out of the house I was about to say, when I got the point at last.

They *were* trying to get me out of the house.

A warm feeling welled up in me.

"Okay," I said.

"You're going to walk out to those rocks?" Herbie said. He sounded surprised.

"Sure," I said.

"Well." He looked around uncertainly. "That's great." He seemed at a loss. "We'll—ah—clean up." He was more interested in cleaning up this weekend than in all of the three years in which we had been man and wife.

"Yeah," Bunny said in an unnatural voice.

I glanced at her. She turned her head away hurriedly and coughed.

As conspirators they were not so hot. I went into the bedroom where I put on my pink sunsuit, amused to note that in the kitchenette, apart from the occasional nervous clank of dishware, there was total silence.

"Be good," I called as I skipped out of the cottage, accidentally knocking a little piece of wood out of the screen door.

On the sand, filled with an affectionate glow, I slowed down instead of moving briskly towards the sand strip, which was about two hundred yards away, and unconsciously began to dawdle, though of course I had no idea what I was doing at the time.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Presently it seemed as if I had done all the unconscious dawdling there was to do and would have to start towards the sand strip after all, when there was a hail from the other direction.

Turning, I beheld the goodlooking youth from the next cottage approaching at a lithe trot.

"Well, hello there," I said lightly.

"I saw you from the window," he explained when he had halted.

"I'm going for a walk," I said unnecessarily, as that was what we were now doing, side by side.

"Oh, yeah?"

"While they get things ready."

"Who's they?"

I realized that I had not enumerated the full complement of my cottage.

"My husband brought his secretary along."

"He did?"

"It's a surprise."

He gave me a look.

"Well, well," he said noncommittally.

We had almost reached the strip of sand.

"I'm going out there," I said.

"What?" he said, coming to a stop.

"To that bunch of rocks."

"Didn't anybody tell you?" he asked in an anxious tone.

"Tell me what?"

"In half an hour you won't be able to walk back."

"Why not?"

"That sand will be under water."

"It will?"

"So will the rocks, for that matter."

I had to chuckle. This was really funny.

"That man!"

He was frowning in an attractive manner.

"You mean your husband knew you were going to walk out to those rocks?"

"Listen," I said, "he suggested it."

"It was his *idea?*"

"He doesn't get anything right."

He opened his mouth. He closed it.

"It's a good thing I was around again," he said finally.

"It sure is."

"How about strolling down the beach a little?" He gave me an

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

impenetrable look, which in fact I easily penetrated. "Unless your husband needs you."

"It looks more like he's trying to get rid of me," I replied humorously.

"I can't see why," he retorted gallantly.

In which playful fashion we sauntered down the beach while he described college life, wild parties, etc., while I played the part of the Older Woman, but not too old. Our return trip was through the dunes, for a change of scenery, so that when we arrived at the cottage it was from the rear rather than the front, from which I had set out approximately one hour ago.

"Well," I said, "I'd better not ask you in. Considering that they're waiting for me."

"Maybe you'll be out walking this afternoon," he said, "and I can save you from something else."

We looked at each other inscrutably, and he walked away, leaving me to my reflections and to what, I realized, as I proceeded up the cement walk to the back door, was the sound of Bunny and Herbie's voices from inside.

"She's still with that kid," Bunny's voice said raspingly. It sounded as if she'd already been through most of her first pack.

"So what?"

"So what have they been talking about all this time?"

"She's probably having an argument with him about what day of the week it is. Like she does with everybody else."

"She suspects something, for God's sake."

"No, she doesn't."

"She's not that dumb."

"Yes, she is."

I smiled to myself.

"This whole thing is crazy."

"You saw the insurance policy."

"You and your goddamn insurance policies."

Herbie must have taken out some kind of insurance policy. That was nice of him. Still, I hoped he was giving me something besides an insurance policy.

"It pays double in the event of accident."

"What accident?" Bunny said sarcastically.

Herbie lowered his voice so I had to hold my breath to hear.

"I fixed the car."

I looked at the car, which I was standing next to. It looked the same as before.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Terrific," Bunny said bitterly.

"I fixed the pilot light on the stove."

That was nice, too. Getting the stove going was a real problem.

"Wonderful."

"And I took care of the back step."

I could see he'd been doing something to the back step. There was a piece of wire stretched across it, attached to two big nails at each end.

He'd certainly been going to a lot of trouble for me. I felt a little guilty.

"Marvelous."

"One of them's got to work."

He sounded desperate. I made up my mind to be kinder to him in future about his repair jobs.

"I want a cigarette," Bunny said.

"Then come outside, for Christ's sake, before you light it."

I heard the front door open and close. They seemed to have moved onto the front porch. I stepped over Herbie's wire, being careful not to bend it, and opened the back door. All the windows were closed, too, and there was a funny smell.

I tiptoed through the sitting room, peering keenly about me. Nothing looked any different.

Herbie and Bunny were hunched over on the front steps. I opened the front door.

"What the hell are you doing," Bunny cried, leaping up, "pussy-footing around?"

"Pussy-footing around?" I began indignantly. I stepped out. It seemed to me they had some explaining to do. "I'm just—"

With the heel of a beach clog, much in vogue two years ago, she ground out the cigarette she must have dropped.

"Why can't you do what you're supposed to do?"

"And what exactly am I—"

"I don't believe this!"

"What I would like to know is—"

"What *I* would like to know is what am I doing here?"

"Where are you going?" Herbie asked her as she ran up the front steps.

"Into the goddamn house!"

"What for?"

"I'm out of goddamn matches, for God's sake!" she yelled from inside the cottage.

"Hey," he called, starting after her, "wait a minute!"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

From the kitchenette came the sound of a wooden match being struck, followed by a whoosh and bang, and then by a loud scream. There was a clatter, as of the oven door falling off, and Bunny staggered into view and down the front steps, holding an unlit cigarette.

"Jesus Christ," she said, laughing merrily with tears streaming down her face. "The stove blew up."

"I told you I fixed the pilot light," Herbie shouted furiously.

"I'm leaving," she announced hysterically.

"What?" Herbie demanded.

Bunny disappeared unsteadily around the corner of the cottage. Herbie sprang up the steps, with me at his heels. Before we could inspect the damage in the kitchenette, however, there was a roar from outside.

"What's that?" he cried wildly.

I seemed to possess the only cool head.

"The car," I said.

"The car?"

"You must have left the keys in it."

"Oh, God!"

He lunged towards the back door. Apparently he did not remember about the wire he had nailed across the back step. He landed on all fours on the cement walk and with a cry of pain tried to crawl to the car.

"Bunny," he yelled, "the brakes—"

But Bunny, a feverish expression gripping her thin features, was accelerating rapidly backwards into Beach Road. A puzzled frown appeared briefly above her sharp nose. With a hollow crash, the rear of the Oldsmobile backed forcefully into the stone wall on the other side.

Herbie collapsed on the cement walk. Bunny leaned against the steering wheel, sobbing. The horn, which had not been operating for six months, began to blow. With relief I saw Mike running from the next cottage.

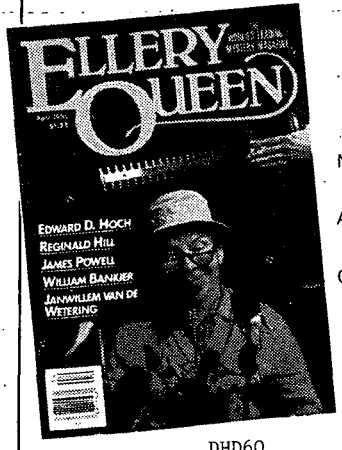
Herbie had certainly fixed things.

So that is my statement, which I will be glad to read and sign after it has been typed up and which I hope expresses the events of this unfortunate weekend clearly and succinctly. I will just state in addition that I think the police have been very helpful, and I understand that you will have to make a complete investigation in cooperation with the insurance company,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

although I cannot see why you want to bother, since everything Herbie does turns out wrong. If you wish to interview him and his secretary, I am told that they will be at the hospital for at least a week, recovering from their multiple fractures, contusions, abrasions, etc. Where he will not, alas, be visited by me. Our relationship has come to an end. Whatever else he may have thought he was doing for me, he completely forgot our wedding anniversary.

A special offer for mystery fans...



12 issues of Ellery Queen for only $15.97
(Save 24% off the regular newsstand price)

☐ Payment enclosed ☐ Bill me
☐ Please renew my current subscription

Name_____

Address_____

City_____ State____ Zip_____

For Immediate Subscription Service Call **TOLL FREE 1-800-247-2160** (in IOWA 1-800-362-2860).

Outside US and Poss. $19.20 (cash with order US funds).

Please allow 6 to 8 weeks for your first issue.

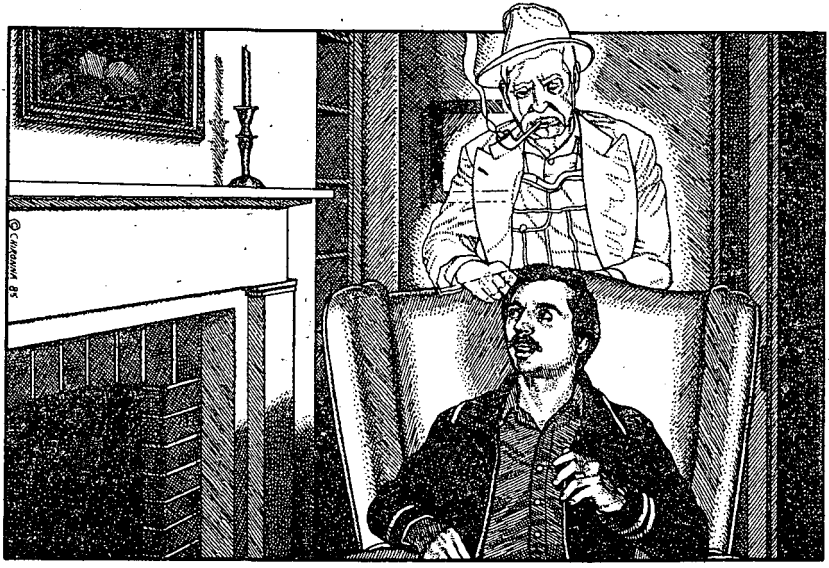
DHD6Q

☐ ALSO, SEND 12 ISSUES OF ALFRED HITCHCOCK FOR $15.97 (OUTSIDE US AND POSSESSIONS $19.97). WE'LL BILL YOU LATER.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Haunted Chair

by Stephen F. Wilcox



The Ternicks first approached me about their haunted chair one Sunday morning in April, buttonholing me in the gravel parking lot next to the church. It was the first truly warm spring day of the year after four months of long and bitter winter in upstate New York, and I wasn't eager to spend any of it listening to a superstitious yarn. I had a yard to mow and a garden plot that needed turning; but conscience—and the morning's sermon—held me.

I already knew something of the Ternicks' dilemma, thanks to our church pastor, the Reverend James. He had spoken to

Illustration by Ronald Chironna

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

me about it the previous Thursday, following our weekly youth counseling session with a few of the congregation's teenagers. "It seems Mr. and Mrs. Ternick are suffering under the delusion that old Mr. Brecht, Mrs. Ternick's late father, has been paying nocturnal visits," Reverend James told me. "They've obviously been under a great deal of strain since the old gentleman passed on in February, and frankly, I'm worried about the both of them. They're quiet, almost stoic, people by nature, so I know it took a great deal of soulsearching for them to ask for help. I've done what I can to encourage them to deal with their problem rationally; I even suggested psychiatric evaluation, but they won't hear of it. Then I brought up your name and suggested you might be of help. They took to the idea immediately. I hope you don't mind."

"It's not that I mind exactly, Reverend," I hedged, "but what good could I possibly do?"

"You studied psychology in college. And your volunteer work with the church's youth counseling program has been exemplary."

"Still, I'm hardly qualified for something like this. I'm a newspaperman, not Sigmund Freud."

"Ah, but there's the beauty of it." The good pastor smiled devilishly. "You see, I believe you may be able to provide the Ternicks with sage counsel. I knew, however, that they would be reluctant to open up to you in such a role, so I sold them the idea on the basis of your experience as a newsman. Investigative journalism and all that."

"Reverend James, I publish and edit a small-town weekly, not the Washington *Post*."

He patted my arm reassuringly, "Totally irrelevant for our purposes. The important thing is your willingness to lend your counseling skills to a neighbor in need, yes? Say, that might make for a good sermon this Sunday: 'Help Thy Neighbor.' "

And so it was that I found myself in the church parking lot on a sunny Sunday morning, listening to a tale that would have been ludicrous if not for the utterly sincere look of pain etched into the face of Ruth Ternick.

"My father hadn't a sick day in his life until the last couple years," Mrs. Ternick began. She was a tall, heavy-boned woman in her late forties, her mouse-brown hair strewn with gray. "He kept the farm up nice, did the chores with Arno here," she nodded toward her husband,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"even pitched in with the hayin' every summer right up to the age of seventy-five. That's when he started havin' the problems with his lungs. Caught pneumonia two years ago last October and went downhill from there. The doctors found somethin' bad with his heart, too, a weak valve, they said.

"Anyway, he was in the hospital from last Christmas to the middle of January. Bills were beginnin' to eat us alive, so the doctors let us take him home to look after him ourselves. That was my job, only I don't guess I did too good."

"Now, woman, don't start that again," Mr. Ternick cut in. He was an angular man in his mid-fifties, with a windburned face and a freckled scalp where hair used to grow. He wore thick glasses that made his eyes appear unnaturally small and sunken. "She goes on thataway sometimes," the farmer said to me, "even though ol' Da—that's what we called Ruth's dad—had one foot in the grave the minute he set foot in the hospital. Blames herself 'cause she was off to do the grocery shoppin' when ol' Da had his last fit and died. Figures she coulda done somethin' if she'd been home, but that don't make sense. It was God's will is all."

I made the appropriate noises of sympathy and then, in spite of my misgivings, asked them to tell their story.

"Well, it started about a month after Da passed on," Mrs. Ternick said. "I come down stairs one mornin' and smell Da's old burley pipe tobacco. Arno here, he's a chewer, don't smoke at all, so I figured I must be dreamin'. But when I go into the livin' room, I find old Da's pipe sittin' in the ashtray and his easy chair up next to the fireplace, just like he always had it."

I interrupted. "You mean, the chair had been moved?"

She nodded. "After he passed on, you see, I put his chair and smokestand off in the corner, so's we could watch the television better. Only there it was, right back by the fireplace. Well, I asked Arno here if he did it, though I couldn't imagine why he'd be movin' stuff and smokin' Da's old pipe and everythin'."

"'Course not," Mr. Ternick growled.

"Anyhow," his wife continued, "we couldn't figure it out at all, except maybe someone got in the house some way in the night and did it, who knows why? So, after a while, we just stopped thinkin' about it and went on about our chores. What else could we do?" I nodded my agreement, and she went on. "Well, next mornin' when Arno

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

comes down to head out to the milk barn, he takes a look and darned if that old chair isn't right back in front of the fireplace again, pipe lyin' out and ashes in the ashtray. And it kept on like that for a week; I'd move the chair and smokestand back in the corner, next mornin' it's back in front of the fireplace.

"Like I say, this goes on for a week, and finally Arno here says he's had enough. He don't believe in ghosts and he's gonna get to the bottom of this thing, even if it costs him a night's sleep. So he decides to sit up and watch the chair."

I was still reluctant to get involved, but I'll admit I was warming to the tale. "What happened that night?" I asked.

Ternick shrugged. "I fell asleep. Ain't used to them late hours. Farm people, we gotta get up early. I remember I was watchin' that Carson fella on the TV and I just dozed off. Didn't wake up till near five o'clock. When I did, the TV had nothin' but snow on it—and that old chair was right back in front of the fireplace."

"Hmmm" was all I had a chance to say before Mrs. Ternick resumed the strange story.

"I guessed I'd try stayin' up the next night and see if I could do better. Arno went up to bed around nine thirty and I set there on the sofa with my crewel work, watchin' the television with one eye and that old chair with the other. Along about midnight—I remember I was watchin' some news show with some fella looked a little like Howdy Doody—I all of a sudden smell pipe tobacco, so I sorta blink my eyes and quick look over at the chair, and Da had it moved again. Happened so fast, I never really saw it. It was just there."

"You're sure you didn't fall asleep?"

"I don't think so. I was sleepy, I remember. I coulda closed my eyes for a few seconds, I suppose. You know how it is when you get so relaxed you get kinda drowsy? Anyway, I sure stayed awake the rest of that night. I mean, I even tried talkin' to him . . . you know, to the chair. Kept askin', 'Da, why're you doin' this?' I told him how sorry I was . . . but nothin' came of it. He didn't answer me back."

With that Mrs. Ternick lowered her head and tried to suppress a deep sob. She failed. Her husband began to raise a hand to comfort her, then dropped it to his side. Instead, he squinted at me through his thick glass lenses and implored, "Can't you just see what this . . . this hauntin' is doin' to us? We gotta do somethin'. Somebody's gotta help us . . . make him go away."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I had them go over their story again, point by point, inserting a question here and there, all the while hoping to latch onto a plausible explanation that might satisfy them and get me out of it. I dredged up what psycho-babble I could recall from college lectures, tried reasoning with them as I would with one of the troubled teens in my youth counseling group, and, as a last resort, I baldly posited that grief and guilt over old Mr. Brecht's death had somehow created a hysteria that was causing them to hallucinate. But they weren't having any of it. Ironically, they found it easier to believe that ol' Da was haunting their living room than to accept the possibility of mental aberration within themselves.

I then decided on the obvious tack and suggested they remove from the house the chair, the smokestand, and pipe, anything that had belonged to Mr. Brecht. Unfortunately, they weren't having any of that, either.

"The missus here, she don't want to let go of none of ol' Da's stuff," Ternick said, sounding equal parts frustrated and disgusted. "Claims it's all she's got left of the old man."

"Wouldn't do any good anyhow, gettin' rid of those few things," his wife defended herself. "Sakes alive, everythin' in the house used to be Da's, almost, includin' the house. It was him that first owned the farm, y'see. Arno came on as a partner like, after we married. So we'd have to get rid of the whole house, and then he'd probably start turnin' up in the milk barn."

It was a peculiar piece of logic, admittedly, but at the time I could think of nothing to refute it. There was a long silence, the Ternicks staring at me expectantly while I ground the toe of my best black shoe into the gravel of the parking lot. It seemed I had no choice, so I offered to go out to the farm and spend a night on the Ternicks' sofa. There was an explanation, I knew; one that didn't include the ghost of old Mr. Brecht haunting his favorite chair. Perhaps I, unburdened with the baggage of guilt and superstition that weighed down these simple people, could expose the truth behind their torment. Whatever it might be.

What with the demands of putting out the weekly paper, I was unable to make it out to the Ternick farm until the following Thursday. In the interim—when I wasn't busy rewriting the Kiwanis Club's monthly news bulletin or cov-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ering the Four-H Fair at the high school or any of a dozen other duties associated with a small-town newspaper—I managed to stop by the library and peruse everything I could find on parapsychology and unexplained phenomena. What sparse and inconclusive information I was able to dig up merely served to convince me that I was a fool to let the Reverend involve me in the affair in the first place.

Nevertheless, I drove out to the farm around seven o'clock that Thursday evening, as agreed. The Ternicks, looking even more drawn and subdued than they had on Sunday, stood waiting for me on the porch of the house. It was a large, vaguely Victorian place of gabled roof lines and intricate lattice work which, on the whole, could have been handsome with a fresh coat of paint. After a somber, perfunctory greeting, my hosts ushered me into a long rectangular living room with a huge brick fireplace at one end, several pieces of overstuffed furniture hugging the walls and a flowery carpet stretched across the floor. The chair and smoking stand that had prompted my visit were tucked off into a corner several feet removed from the fireplace.

"Up till this mornin', we been leavin' the chair in Da's spot over by the fireplace," Mrs. Ternick explained matter-of-factly. "Figurin', why keep movin' it back to the corner, since it don't stay put anyhow. I had Arno here move it back this mornin', though, so you could see for yourself what we mean. In the mornin', I mean."

"Did anything happen while the chair was left in its old spot by the fire?" I asked.

Mrs. Ternick nodded. "He still come by every night to smoke that old briar pipe. I know, 'cause every mornin' I have to dump out the ashtray."

The first half of the evening was uneventful in every sense. We each staked out a seat in the living room—leaving the late Mr. Brecht's favorite chair unoccupied, of course—and watched a procession of television shows; a moronic game show, a half-decent detective serial, a couple of improbable sitcoms, each stuffed with enough corn to fill the Ternicks' silo. I tried several times to engage my hosts in a discussion of the possible psychological reasons behind their "haunted chair," employing every buzz word and catch phrase I could remember from my research, but my attempts were rebuffed with skeptical mumblings and knowing glances from husband to wife and back again.

At nine thirty precisely, as

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the schoolhouse clock on the mantel chimed once for the half hour, Ruth Ternick brought from the kitchen a steaming pot of tea and a dish of homemade oatmeal cookies. Arno Ternick stood, yawned as only a farmer can yawn at the end of a hard day, and shuffled off to bed.

"You keep awake, now," Mrs. Ternick admonished me as she followed her husband up the stairs. "You'll see how it is."

I waited a few pregnant minutes until I heard a toilet flush, a closet door slam, and a set of bedsprings moan. Then, satisfied that my hosts had retired, I began a thorough examination of the living room—although I couldn't say what I expected to find. I looked behind the sofa, I drew back the drapes, I got on hands and knees and rolled back a corner of the carpet, I flicked lamps on and off and on again, I even stirred the ashes in the grate. Last, and I admit not without some irrational but heartfelt trepidation, I inspected the inside of the old man's smokestand—nothing unusual there—and gently eased myself into the mysterious chair.

As expected, nothing happened. No tingling sensations, no sudden chills along the spine, no groaning protests from disembodied voices in the night. I was simply sitting in a tattered Morris chair, all alone in a dowdy living room. Satisfied with my own sanity at least, I got up and returned to the sofa where I set to work on the tea and cookies.

The schoolhouse clock on the mantel chimed twelve times. The fabled witching hour, I reminded myself with a somewhat self-conscious chuckle. The cookies were gone, as was most of the tea in the heavy pewter pot that rested on the end table beside me. Perhaps Mr. Brecht's ghost was gone, too, for it surely hadn't disturbed the furniture this night. I had spent the previous two hours staring into the corner at the chair and smokestand, almost daring them to move while, at the same time, I tried to think of a way to get through to the Ternicks, when they came down for breakfast in the morning, something that might jar them back to reality.

It was then that I heard footsteps above me, quiet and slow, making their way from the second floor bedroom to the top of the stairway. I twisted around on the sofa and watched as a pair of pink fuzzy feet descended behind the balustrade. As they reached the bottom of the stairs, I realized that the slippered feet belonged to Mrs. Ternick. I started to stand and to speak, but the vacuous look in her eyes held me in place. Her long flannel nightgown billowing out from her sides, she

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

walked past me as if I didn't exist and strode to the corner where her father's chair and smokestand sat waiting. Noiselessly on the heavy carpet she slid the smokestand across the room to a spot next to the fireplace.

"Mrs. Ternick?" I called to her softly. She didn't reply but instead pushed the cumbersome Morris chair until it joined the smokestand beside the fireplace. And then she sat down.

"Mrs. Ternick?" I tried again, more forcefully. Again, no acknowledgment. Standing, I positioned myself halfway between the sofa and the fireplace and watched, fascinated, as she took her father's briar from the stand, slowly filled it with fibrous burley tobacco, and lit the bowl with a wooden kitchen match.

"Of course," I mumbled to myself as she puffed away contentedly, still oblivious to my presence. "You just couldn't shake loose the guilt of your father dying when you weren't there to help him. So you bring him back to his favorite spot every night, a contented old man nursing his pipe in front of the fire."

I knew there had to be a logical explanation, I thought, giving myself a mental pat on the back as I turned and headed toward the stairs. Simple enough now to fetch Mr. Ternick and let him witness the scene for himself, after which we could gently awaken his troubled wife and go from there.

"Nooooooo!" I was halfway across the room when I heard it, a deep gutteral cry that arrested me in mid-stride. I turned back to Mrs. Ternick, who was now staring up at me from the chair, her eyes burning like the pipe she held in her hand. I had nearly convinced myself that I had imagined the cry—it had been an old man's ragged voice I had heard—when her mouth opened again and another incongruous rumbling roared from her lips. "Murrrr-derrr."

Startled out of my paralysis, I jumped backward into the end table. The clatter of the heavy pewter tea service as it hit the floor resounded through the house, but Ruth Ternick's smoldering gaze remained steady. Now came heavy footsteps hurrying across the ceiling and down the stairs. I lost all equilibrium and fell back onto the sofa just as Arno Ternick came through the living room archway, his bathrobe hanging on him like a shroud, his eyes without the heavy spectacles blinking furiously against the lamplight, his hands gripping a shotgun.

"Youuuuu . . . mur-der-errr!" came again the old man's voice from the woman in the chair.

"No, Da," Arno Ternick cried,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

his eyes squinting, terror and confusion amplifying his words. "You were already dyin' . . . there was no use . . . the doctor bills . . . eatin' away our savin's . . . "

"Youuuuu," the terrible, alien voice screamed as Ruth Ternick, her arm outstretched, finger pointing at her husband, began to rise from the Morris chair.

I remember seeing her body lift up suddenly and slam against the fireplace while, in the same frozen instant, a deafening gun blast voided all else. Then time began again, and Mrs. Ternick lay in a heap upon the hearth, her flannel nightgown dotted everywhere crimson, her mouth bleeding like an open sore.

And Arno Ternick, shotgun lying at his feet, standing still as death in the archway, eyes fixed on the empty chair, softly saying over and over again, "Had to, Da . . . Had to, Da . . . Had to, Da . . . "

It wasn't until Arno Ternick's trial for manslaughter that the whole story came out. The medical bills piling up, the second mortgage due on the farm in March, the old man lying up in his room and dying a day at a time, but somehow hanging on. Until the morning Ruth went off to shop and Arno came in from the milk barn and heard the dreadful wheezing. There was old Mr. Brecht on the bedroom floor, gasping for the pills that sat on the bureau not ten feet away. Arno stood in the doorway and looked at the old man, and the old man looked at him, and both men knew the pills would never leave the bureau.

The trial was over by early June, just as the strawberries in my garden came ready. Arno was put away in a hospital with barred windows and steel doors. Ruth already rested beside her father in the little cemetery next to our church. How she knew what Arno had done . . . well, that was just one of many questions that none of us could answer.

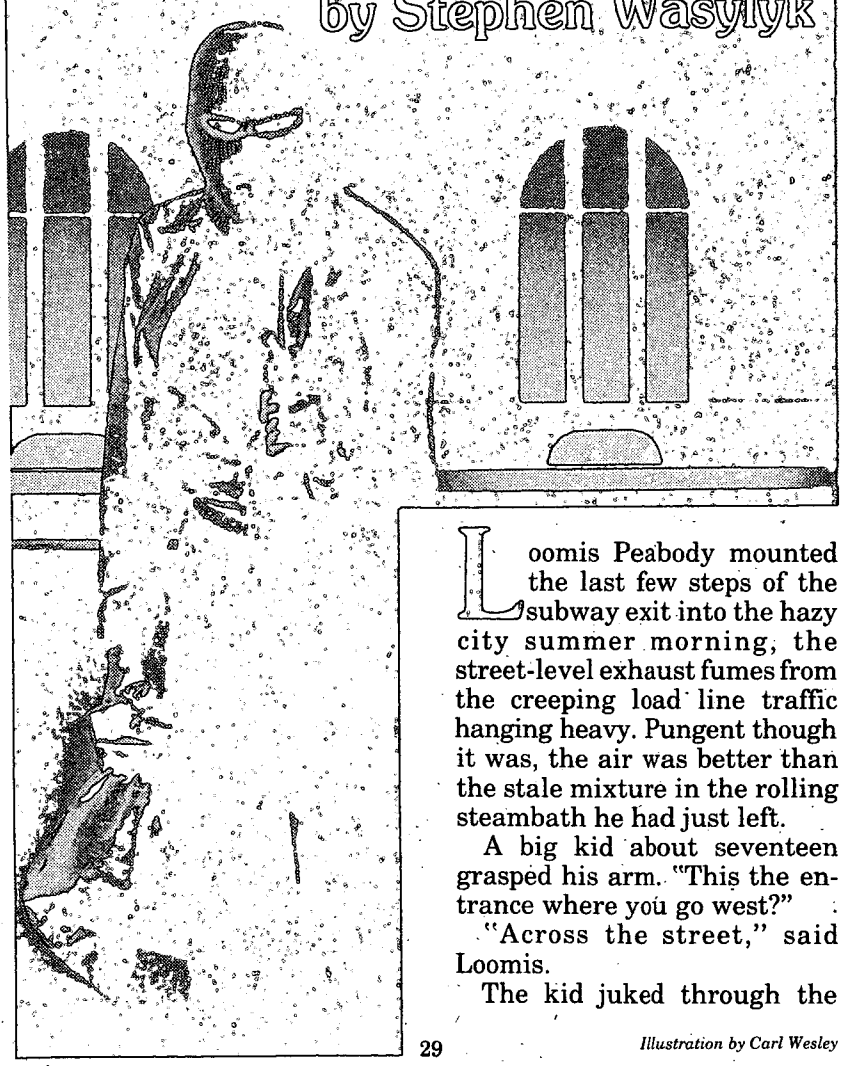
Of course the newspapers in the city wrote the story up big. But I never wrote it up at all. It just wasn't the kind of thing that belonged in a small-town weekly. At least, not in mine.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

FICTION

The Holdup

by Stephen Wasylyk



Loomis Peabody mounted the last few steps of the subway exit into the hazy city summer morning, the street-level exhaust fumes from the creeping load line traffic hanging heavy. Pungent though it was, the air was better than the stale mixture in the rolling steambath he had just left.

A big kid about seventeen grasped his arm. "This the entrance where you go west?"

"Across the street," said Loomis.

The kid juked through the

Illustration by Carl Wesley

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

moving traffic with the grace and abandon of a running back on his way to a hundred yard afternoon.

"Hey, Loomis!"

The woman approaching was short and solid, parting pedestrians as effortlessly as a bowling ball parted tenpins.

If Annie Ballew had once had a shape like the thirty-foot svelte blonde model on the rooftop billboard, photographically frozen for eternity with a can of diet drink pressed rapturously to her lips, it had gone with the years. She was now the shape of the diet drink can.

Annie brandished the foot-long length of a collapsible umbrella. "Thought I'd have to rescue you. Looked like you were being mugged."

Loomis smiled. "You look exceptionally happy this morning."

She fell into step beside him. "Won't last. Never does. I go downhill fast after my eggs and toast. Twenty-five years in that bank does that to you."

Loomis could understand that. Its custom decimated when the businesses it served gradually closed or moved to the suburbs, the branch was now surrounded by boarded windows and deteriorating buildings. Known in the system as the Gulag, it was where a few people, like Loomis, began but where those who couldn't make the grade or were on their way out were exiled.

Loomis glanced down at her. "Eggs have too much cholesterol, Annie. Don't you know that?"

"Not these. Guaranteed personally by the hen to be cholesterol-free."

Loomis grinned. "Suppose the hen lied?"

"I'll find a lawyer nuts enough to sue, which in this day and age won't be difficult." She extended the umbrella before her, a javelin parting the phalanx of pedestrians. "On the other hand," she said thoughtfully, "maybe I'll just eat the hen. It certainly would be cheaper."

Loomis chuckled. He always enjoyed talking to Annie. In spite of the years she'd put in, she was still a teller because she was brash, truthful, and outspoken, qualities never loved by the succession of pompous managers making a mandatory stop on their way to the executive dining room downtown. She should have been assistant manager at the very least, and there were times when Loomis felt guilty because he had the title and she didn't.

She glanced at him. "What's this about cholesterol? You a health-food nut, Loomis?"

"No, just careful of what I eat. Whole grains, fresh fruits and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

vegetables, no salt, no sugar, no fat—"

"You're too young to worry about what you eat."

They paused as a traffic light turned red.

"It's been proved medically—"

"Don't tell me of proved medically, Loomis. You're speaking of a profession that once insisted you keep your windows closed at night or you would contract miasma, and that thought a guy named Semmelweis was nuts because he told them they should wash their hands before delivering babies. I suppose you jog, too?"

"Three miles every morning."

"Good Lord. You'll be the healthiest guy in the cemetery. You must have one vice. How about girls?"

"I'll tell you a secret. Ever since Mitzi Scheinbocher took my ice cream cone and knocked me down in the third grade, I haven't been too successful with women. I guess they don't find me very attractive."

"Forget attractive, Loomis." The extended umbrella parted the crowd approaching from the other corner as they crossed the street. "Only the birdbrains think looks are important. Fortunately for the future of mankind, the average female gives other things a higher score." She tapped him with the umbrella. "Like dependability. You're dependable, Loomis, so remember that when you're sitting in your lonely apartment on a Saturday night. Somewhere out there is a female health nut willing to share her sesame seeds with anyone this side of the Werewolf of London as long as he's dependable. How about Della, the manager's new secretary?"

"A little colorless, don't you think?"

"Why? Because she doesn't have a mattress-stuffing hairdo and wear peekaboo blouses? How do you know what's behind those spectacles and beneath those business suits if you don't investigate? Take my advice, Loomis. Forget the health foods, the proved medically, and the jogging. Spirit the girl away to Atlantic City for a weekend orgy of gambling, gluttony, and sex. The time to be dissolute is when you're young and can enjoy it. Before you know it, your feet will hurt and your back will ache and the most exciting thing in your life will be the snap, crackle, and pop in your bowl of cereal."

Her voice was almost wistful as they paused before the glass door of the bank. The elderly guard inside nodded, turned the key, and let them in.

They stepped into a small vestibule. Double glass doors to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

their left opened into a small, narrow lobby, the tellers' counter hidden behind the vestibule, four desks behind a railing at the rear.

Annie stopped. "Why no lights, Mr. Bainbridge? Saving energy, or is my reputation for being last in and first out in danger?"

Mr. Bainbridge appeared pale. "Just move inside, please, Annie. You, too, Loomis. Please."

Loomis stepped out of the vestibule into the lobby.

Screened from anyone outside, a man with a stocking mask held a black revolver pointed at Loomis's stomach.

Loomis had never touched a gun, never even come close to one. The cavernous muzzle, the softly rounded, deadly copper noses of the cartridges in the cylinder, and a deep scratch in the steel of the trigger guard etched themselves into his memory as the rest of his body went numb.

One twitch of the man's gloved finger and he'd be dead.

He started to raise his hands.

"Keep them down and get in here!" snapped the man.

Loomis moved, his legs wooden.

"Keep walking," the man said softly.

"Do as he says," Annie said calmly.

At the end of the tellers' counter, another man casually leaned on the chest-high surface, a revolver held loosely and pointed down. He motioned them behind the counter.

They hadn't been first to arrive. The others were seated on the floor in the gloom: Della, her face so white it was almost translucent; Marcia, middle-aged and prim, her arm around Della's shoulders; Arlington, the loan officer, his arms clasped about his knees; Renee, his assistant, her face almost as white as Della's; and Rodale, who had once read a book about dressing your way to success, looking annoyed because his light tan summer suit wasn't designed for sitting on floors.

The man who had been in the front of the bank brought Mr. Bainbridge up. "That's it. Seven. Not counting him."

Loomis leaned against the wall. The man with Bainbridge was shorter and heavier than the one who stood guard inside.

The tall one eased his revolver forward to the tip of the guard's nose.

"Give me the key and listen carefully. Stand at the door. If anyone wants in, point at the sign that says the bank opens at nine thirty. Don't get cute and don't get smart or we'll shoot one of these people, just as we told you before."

Bainbridge nodded.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The man motioned the others to their feet. "We're going to turn on the lights. Each of you go to where you're supposed to be and stay there. Don't reach for the phones or the silent alarm buttons. We've disconnected them along with the camera. One phone is open in case there's an incoming call. The grayhaired guy will answer." The gun swung to Arlington. "If he says the wrong thing, he dies."

Arlington swallowed hard.

"We'll be where we can't be seen from the street, but where we can watch all of you. Take it easy and no one gets hurt. The time lock releases in fifteen minutes, and the skinny kid here," he pointed at Loomis, "will open the vault for us. Five minutes after that we'll be gone." He nodded at Bainbridge. "Turn on the lights. The rest of you go to where you should be."

Loomis took the first teller's window, Annie beside him, Marcia and Rodale filling the others while Arlington, Renee, and Della went to their desks.

To anyone looking in the plate glass window, it would appear to be the beginning of another banking day.

Fifteen minutes until the time lock clicked. Loomis knew it would be the longest fifteen minutes of his life. Why did Hempstead, the manager, have to be late this morning? Things that could happen drifted in and out of his mind, none that would get the two men out of the bank without those guns going off.

The tall gunman slid into a chair before Della's desk from where he could watch the people in the office; the other stood at the end of the tellers' counter, concealed from the outside by the vestibule.

The tall one leaned toward Della. "I've been watching you, doll. How would you like to go along with me?"

Della's face was even whiter, her eyes fixed on the far wall.

"You'll be going with a man who knows how to show a woman a good time. I always travel first class."

He stretched out the revolver and used the barrel to part the lapels of her suit. "I have an idea you might be interesting."

Her eyes appealed to Loomis.

"Let her alone," he said.

The tall man turned slowly, bringing the gun to bear on him.

"You have a romantic attachment to this lady, kid?"

Loomis felt his throat muscles locking. "No, but I'm the assistant manager, and I'm responsible for these people."

The revolver came up and leveled, only two feet from

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Loomis's chest. "I don't take any backtalk from anyone, kid." The man's voice carried the same blued-steel terror as the gun in his hand.

Loomis held his breath, feeling his stomach muscles contract in anticipation of the bullet. The office was still, the whirring of tires on macadam from the traffic outside the only sound. Loomis wondered if that would be the last thing he would hear.

Annie stepped to his side.

"Hold it, genius. Are you here to rob the bank or to hassle the female help? Force the kid to do something and you'll have to shoot him, and then who will open the vault?"

The shorter man spoke. "Listen to the fat lady. Messing with the help wasn't part of the deal."

The tall man shrugged.

Loomis felt his body sag and his left knee begin to tremble. He glanced at the clock. Two minutes. He wondered if the ice in his stomach would ever thaw.

At nine, the vault gave a little whirr and click, and the tall man waved the gun. "Let's go."

Inside the small, stainless steel cage that protected the safety deposit boxes, Loomis twirled the combination and swung the door open. The vault was small, hardly four feet deep and with just enough room between the shelves for one person.

To his right, the day's cash supply was arranged neatly in the tellers' drawers, the extra cash lined up on a shelf protected by a sliding plastic door that had been installed after an enterprising loan officer, making excuses to enter the vault, managed to stuff all the pockets of an ingenious money belt with assorted bills. When he failed to return from lunch, the manager had run a quick check, and the police had been waiting when the loan officer stepped from the plane in Los Angeles, the money belt still draped around his middle and a small, large-eyed librarian draped from his arm. The loan officer had been sentenced to ten years, the librarian to living out her romantic fantasies through the books on her shelves.

At Loomis's feet were two heavy canvas bags. One, with a green tag, held the excess cash, both paper and coins, generated the day before, along with the worn and damaged bills the tellers had set aside for the main office to turn in for new money.

The other, tagged with yellow, held what Loomis called the paper, withdrawal and deposit slips and checks that had been presented for payment. The slips were destined for the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

twenty-four hour a day department downtown where they were pushed through electronic sorting machines to end in alphabetized bins, the amounts to appear on the monthly statements. The checks were routed elsewhere for distribution and for payment from the banks they had been drawn on.

Both bags had been scheduled for a mid-morning armored car pickup, the daily schedule rotating among all the branches in the system so that anyone with his eye on the contents of the armored car was never sure of when it would make an appearance.

Loomis pushed the yellow-tagged bag aside with his foot.

The tall man tapped his shoulder. "What do you think you're doing?"

"Nothing in there but paper," said Loomis. "It's useless to you."

"I'll decide what's useless. Now empty the cash into another bag and drag all three out here."

Loomis did as he was told.

The tall man yanked the cord of Arlington's phone free. He took one of the bags, the short man the other two, and they backed down the small corridor to the rear emergency exit required by law, a steel door in a steel frame, the dead bolt reinforced by a steel bar.

Metal clanged, the door swung open, slammed shut, a car engine roared, and it was over.

Loomis leaped and dropped the bar into place again.

"They won't be back, Loomis," said Annie dryly. "Bainbridge, get an extra door key from the vault and use the pay phone outside to call the cops."

Rodale was contorting himself in an effort to check the seat of his pants for smudges, Marcie had put her head down on the counter, Arlington was patting his face with his handkerchief, Renee was crying softly, and Della was staring at Loomis with wide eyes.

"He was going to shoot you."

"Nah," said Annie. "He was just amusing himself."

She led Loomis to the front of the lobby. "So much for Mitzi Scheinbocher. Didn't I tell you dependable counts for more than looks? But that can wait. Something is screwy here."

Loomis stared at her.

"Don't stand there with your thumb in your ear. *Think!*"

Bainbridge came back in. "The cops are on their way."

"How did they get in, Mr. Bainbridge?" asked Loomis.

"Came up behind me as I unlocked the door, told me not to turn around, pushed me inside. One of them took the key and locked the door again. They marched me to the rear. By

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

then they had the masks on. The tall man told me to let the people in as usual but not to try anything because they would kill someone. You know the bank's rules. I did as I was told."

"No one on the street noticed?" asked Loomis.

"You didn't see the cops show up, did you?" asked Bainbridge testily. "They must have looked like employees going in with me."

"That explains the three-piece suits," said Annie. "In this T-shirt neighborhood, they were a good disguise."

A patrol car pulled to the curb.

"Let them in, Mr. Bainbridge," said Loomis. He turned to Annie. "What did you mean when you said something was screwy?"

"You have a brain. Use it."

"If something is bothering you, tell the police."

"I will, now that I see who they sent."

The man coming through the door was big: square jaw, bull neck, wide thick shoulders, solid through the middle; a tree trunk of a man.

"Everyone all right, Annie?"

"The kids are a little shaky, Zink, and Arlington's pacemaker is probably missing on one cylinder. Better get him checked out at the hospital."

Zink motioned to a patrolman. "You heard. Take care of it."

Loomis glanced at Annie. He hadn't even known Arlington had a pacemaker.

"How about you?" asked Zink. He indicated Loomis. "And him?"

"We're fine. Loomis, meet Sergeant Zinkowsky. When I first met him, he was a skinny patrolman. Beer, pastrami, and junk food made him the man he is today. Zink, you'd better check the alley. The two of them had a car waiting, and one of the street people who bunk down out there may be a late riser and can give you some information."

A patrolman led a protesting Arlington out as Zinkowsky came back to Annie and Loomis. "Any point in dusting for prints?"

"None," said Annie. "Both wore gloves and stocking masks. Why don't you take statements from the three women and the best dressed bank teller in the East and let them go home or get drunk or whatever? Loomis and I will wait here on this bench until you get around to us."

"We haven't notified the main office," said Loomis.

"No need. The phones are dead and the computers haven't been turned on. They'll know

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

something is going on. Right now, accounting, security, and public relations are drawing lots. The losers get to come up here and fill out all sorts of papers with their gold ballpoint pens. If we're lucky, they may park on a side street and get mugged, but if they make it, I'll give you ten to one they're out of here in time to keep their luncheon dates."

Zinkowsky drifted back and pulled out a notebook.

"The kids are taken care of. Let's have your version, Annie. As far as I'm concerned, it's the one that counts." He glanced at Loomis. "No offense, but she's been in the business for a long time."

"Two men," said Annie, "each carrying a snub-nosed .38 and dressed better than the president of the bank, who may be a sleaze but still spends five hundred apiece for his suits."

Zink grinned at Loomis. "He was bank manager here when she started. They never did get along."

"Taller one close to six feet," continued Annie. "Short one about five seven or eight. For his holdup ensemble this morning, the tall one wore a dark gray worsted with subdued pinstripes, blue shirt, rep tie. The other selected dark brown with a side-vented coat, a tan shirt, and a charming foulard that appeared to be real silk. Both outfits were accented by dark gloves and delightful stocking masks in a shade I would call Summer Nude, which unfortunately clashed with the tall one's suit. The big difference was in the shoes. The short man wore heavy, well-worn brogues. The tall one, thin-soled slipons that appeared to be new."

Loomis stared at her. He had noticed none of what she was describing.

"Also, the short one has a mustache. The mask mashed it down, but it couldn't hide it. They took Bainbridge at the door, held him in the vestibule long enough to slip on the masks, and told them they'd shoot him if he didn't do as he was told. Maybe he should have made a break for it when he unlocked the door for the first employees to arrive. He might have made it. Once they had a hostage, he couldn't do a thing. Loomis and I came in last. The others were on the floor behind the counter." She nudged Loomis. "You take it."

Loomis took a deep breath. "While we were waiting for the time lock, the tall one made a pass at the manager's secretary. I objected. I think he would have shot me if Annie hadn't reminded him no one else had the combination of the vault. If you catch up to them be careful

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of him. They took everything. Three bags. He tore out the remaining phone, and they went out the back door. We heard a car take off. That's it."

Zink stopped writing. "Maybe it is, but Annie has the same expression as my wife when she knows something I don't."

"Close the notebook, Zink. If I'm wrong, I don't want it in writing. If I'm right, you can put it down later."

Zink tucked the notebook into his pocket. "Only because I know you. Anyone else would get the bright light and the rubber hose."

"After Loomis and I arrived, the short one brought Bainbridge up and said, 'that's it, seven, not counting him.' How did they know Hempstead wouldn't walk in, or a relief teller? How did they know Bainbridge wasn't the type to give them trouble at the door? How did they know how to switch off the alarms and the camera? How did they know what time the lock clicked off? How did they know only Loomis could open the vault? And why did they clean out everything? Any respectable bank robber knows there is always a great deal of paper he can't use, so he makes sure he gets only what he can negotiate. Now, were they just smart and had cased the place for a long time, or—"

"Or was the whole thing a setup?" said Zink. "I don't know, Annie. You can find a logical answer for any of those questions. Who might be the most likely candidate?"

"Well, it can't be one of the women," said Loomis.

Annie rolled her eyes. "I thought chivalry died when women stopped wearing white gloves and started wearing jeans. Let's have a little equality here, Loomis. Men don't have an exclusive on dishonesty and greed. Wouldn't it be possible for one of us, including me, as unlikely as that may seem, to have a money-hungry lover to whom she willingly tells all? She sets it up and meets him two weeks later in Acapulco. Didn't I tell you, for instance, that you had no idea of what Della was like? Maybe those suits and glasses are a put-on and that little scene was staged for our benefit. You may think she's colorless, but she just might lead a private life that would make a soap opera heroine envious."

Zink sighed. "That means I have to check you all out."

"Not me. Or Loomis. He's a health nut and an exercise freak, which is enough anti-social behavior for one man."

"I'm not a health nut," said Loomis. "I simply eat sensibly."

"Same thing," said Annie. "If

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

you're smart, Zink, you'll take off now. I see that our manager and the committee from downtown has arrived. You don't want to get tangled up with them."

Hempstead came at them with long strides, a tall man, polished pate gleaming in the overhead lights, face unlined, one of those men who grow bald early. There was a self-assured air about him Loomis had never liked, as though his career with the bank was determined and he had only to put in his time.

"Everyone all right, Loomis?"

"Arlington was sent to the hospital as a precautionary measure. The others have gone home."

"I was at the main office on other business, so I brought the team along." He indicated the three people with him. "I'm sure you know Carruthers of Security and Leonetti of Accounting. You may not have met Miss Davis of Public Relations. She'll handle all contact with the press."

Carruthers, a much smaller version of Zinkowsky, lifted a hand and headed for Bainbridge. Leonetti, a small man with dark hair and a large black briefcase, nodded.

"I'll need you and Hempstead as soon as possible," he said.

"And I'll need the entire story," said Miss Davis, a tall, thin, dark-haired woman with large spectacles, a severely cut dark suit, and a gold ballpoint pen poised over a notepad.

Loomis put an arm around Annie. "Miss Ballew can tell you as much as I. Why don't you talk to her while I go over things with Mr. Leonetti?"

Annie glared at him.

They left an hour and a half later, Leonetti turning at the door to shake Hempstead's hand.

"Good luck in your new position, Hempstead. You know, if the news hadn't come out of Mr. Southwick's office, there might be a few eyebrows raised at your leaving on the day the branch is held up."

Hempstead smiled. "Coincidence, I assure you. Southwick has known about it for some time and has even talked to the people at the bank in Indianapolis to recommend me personally. You'll know where to find me if you need me."

Loomis walked back to his desk with him.

"I didn't know you were leaving."

"A better opportunity, Loomis."

"At least you'll duck all the problems. With those deposit slips gone, the people will come in here screaming when they get their statements."

"Perhaps. All they need do is

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

present their copy of the transaction and you'll straighten it out."

"A great many people aren't exactly careful with their copies," said Loomis.

"That's their problem, isn't it? I wouldn't concern myself too much. A great deal of the information was already in the central computer. But I'm sure you can take care of any difficulty. I told them downtown that you were quite capable of handling the branch until they selected a replacement, and your behavior this morning confirms my opinion."

"Nice of you," said Loomis.

Hempstead waved. "They probably won't give you the job permanently because they like to move people around so they can gain experience, but it will appear on your record, and I'd be surprised if it's more than a year before you have a branch of your own, hopefully better than this stop on the road to oblivion."

He glanced at the clock on the wall and then at his wristwatch as though checking the time.

"Where are you going?" asked Loomis.

Hempstead started to say something almost absently, stopped, and looked at Loomis, his voice suddenly irritated. "Indianapolis, Loomis. I thought you heard me tell Leonetti."

He rose and held out his hand. "Well, you're on your own. My plane leaves in a couple of hours, and I must get moving."

He shook a dumbfounded Annie's hand and was gone.

"Fast promotion, kid," she said.

"Great way to start. With a robbery."

"That's not your fault. After telling the story to Miss Public Relations, I checked the place over. We'll need a couple of maintenance people from downtown to put everything except for the computer terminals back in working order. Let me show you something."

Loomis stood behind her. The screen displayed a rundown of a typical account.

"I know Mrs. Bernstein's account number as well as I know my own, so I called it up just to check out the terminal. She's been coming here as long as I can remember, and she won't go to any other teller if I'm here." She tapped the screen. "I didn't expect this. Five thousand was withdrawn yesterday. Now, I didn't handle it, but then I could have been at lunch. But five thousand in cash would have gone by you, Loomis. Did it?"

Statistics through the years determined how much cash should be on hand on a given

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

day. Any amount up to a thousand dollars could be withdrawn immediately. For anything above that, the bank required advance notice, not because it was reluctant to part with the money but because several large unexpected withdrawals could leave the branch short of working cash.

Loomis shook his head. "Nothing like that. As far as I know, the paperwork showed that the largest withdrawal yesterday was two thousand by Mr. Marion. He was heading for his daughter's home in California for a visit."

"Aha," said Annie softly. "Then who got the five thousand?"

"Transferred?" asked Loomis hopefully.

"C'mon, Loomis, read the screen. Let me try one more." She punched out another account number. "Read it and weep, Loomis."

The last entry was another five-thousand-dollar withdrawal the day before.

Ten thousand gone. The withdrawal slips would have been in the paper sack. If either or both of those withdrawals weren't legitimate, the bank would have to restore the money when the depositors protested, since it had no proof that they were made. The least it would do would be to place the bank in an embarrassing position and open weeks of argument, with Loomis in the middle.

"I can't remember every account number," said Annie, "but I would bet someone hit a few of the larger, more inactive ones."

"I don't understand. The cash totals, the slips, everything has to agree at the end of the day."

"Who signs the daily report, Loomis?"

"Are you telling me Hempstead juggled the figures? That doesn't make sense. How much could he get away with? Too much cash going out of here in a few days would light a fire downtown, and they'd be on him before he could spend a dime. It wouldn't be worth the risk."

"You're forgetting something. He was covered for a month. Yesterday was the first day for this month's statement, so these people wouldn't begin to scream for at least another four or five weeks. Maybe the cockroach decided to give himself a going away present. By the time it surfaced, he would have disappeared into the woodwork. And then, because of the robbery, the bank would have a hard time proving anything."

"Still doesn't make sense. The bank knows where to locate him. I heard him tell Leonetti

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that Southwick had even spoken to the people he was going to work for in Indianapolis. His move has to be legitimate and the robbery a coincidence."

She tapped his forehead. "Too much protein in there, Loomis. No one is escorting him to his new job. What would prevent him from arranging everything nicely to cover himself, skimming off a few grand as a deposit for the two who held up the bank, kissing us all goodbye, and heading for parts unknown after picking up his share of the loot from the suit-models who did the job this morning?"

"But why?"

"This is the Gulag, the graveyard of the system, where officers and employees come to die. Except for a few like you, no one goes on to anything better. Maybe someone clued Hempstead in that this was the end of the line for him. Or maybe he knew something we don't. They've been talking about closing this branch for some time, and it's possible they intended to close him out with it."

"Well, he's given them a damned good excuse," said Loomis bitterly. "The others get fired, you go on early retirement, and they put me behind a teller's window somewhere for the rest of my life. After all, I'm the assistant manager. I should have known something was going on. He suckered me and then had the guts to recommend me for acting manager, knowing damned well that after this broke, they'd never let me manage a men's room."

Annie cocked her head. "First time I've ever seen you get fired up, but you still have a chance. He's only been gone for a half hour. If we're right, he still has to meet those two and get to the airport. Now if I were he, I'd go to another major city, deposit the money in a big bank under an assumed name, and arrange to have it wired to me later. He should be at the airport in say, one hour, without a thought in his head that anyone is onto him yet. All we have to do is call Zink and head him off."

"Sounds easy, but the airport is a big place. Without knowing which plane he's taking, we can't possibly cover all the departures in time. He'll also probably be traveling under an assumed name, so we can't just have the airlines check their passenger lists."

"Damn," said Annie. "If only we knew where he was really going."

Both hands in his pockets, Loomis stared out the window at the afternoon traffic. A battered panel truck, crudely lettered with *Chappie—Trash Hauled, Windoes Cleaned,* rocked and shook as it waited for the light.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Loomis grinned. He hoped Chappie cleaned windows better than he spelled, but the name brought back the sound Hempstead had made when he asked him where he was going.

"Call Zink, Annie. Hempstead's mind must have been on the departure time when I asked him where he was going, so without thinking, he came out with something that sounded like Shindianapolis."

"Zink would kill me if I told him something like that."

"You don't. You tell him Chicago. It's the only major city I know that begins with that sound."

One of the two uniformed airport police spread his hands when they rushed up. "No one of that description on this flight, Zink. Maybe he's taking the next one."

"When is that?" asked Loomis.

"Two hours."

"Too long," said Loomis. "We missed him somehow."

Zink glowered at him. "I knew I shouldn't have listened to you. What made you think he was going to Chicago?"

"Because it begins with the right sound and the flight time is right."

"Not the only way to get there," said the patrolman. "I have a sister who is afraid to fly, so she takes the train."

"Who makes a getaway by train any more?" asked Loomis irritably. "He said he had a *plane* to catch."

"So the cockroach lied," said Annie. "And as far as a getaway is concerned, even a horse and wagon will do if everyone is looking for you at thirty thousand feet." She turned to Zink. "Let's give it a shot."

Zink shrugged. "No point in staying here. I'll call from the car and have someone check the schedule. If it's no go, I'll drop you off in town."

The voice on the radio chuckled at its own humor. "There's a sleeper in twenty minutes. You'll have to fly to make it."

Loomis was out before the car had stopped, sprinting for the center of the cavernous station and the arrival and departure board.

Chicago. Stairway Nine.

He spun, scanning the numbers.

A young woman in a white blouse and blue skirt, about to hook a stainless steel chain across the stairway, saw him coming, Zink after him and Annie lumbering behind. Zink's I.D. folder was out and his deep voice was reverberating from the marble walls.

"Hold that train!"

Openmouthed, she dropped the chain as though she wanted nothing to do with any of it and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

pointed at the conductor on the platform below as Loomis streaked by.

Loomis went down the now-stopped escalator three steps at a time. The tracks on one side of the platform were empty, the other holding a half dozen gleaming cars. Behind him, Zink was shouting at the conductor.

Half bent, Loomis ran down the platform, peering into the windows of the cars. One. Another. Another.

People inside stared back.

He slowed. The whole thing was crazy. He didn't have the slightest proof in the world that Hempstead was on board. For all he knew, the manager was on the way to Cheyenne.

He was halfway past the fourth car when he skidded to a stop.

Inside, Hempstead looked up from a newspaper in time to see him.

Loomis spun and yelled at Zink and pointed as he came charging down the platform and Zink swerved into the door of the car.

Loomis peered into the window again. Hempstead was gone.

Panic touched him. Where could he go?

He had taken off down the platform again, peering into the windows, when Hempstead appeared on the platform out of the last car and sprinted for the end where the tracks disappeared into the darkness of the tunnel.

"Get the sleaze, Loomis!" yelled Annie.

Loomis put on a burst of speed.

Hempstead disappeared down a flight of steps to the track level, and as Loomis reached the head of the stairs, there he was, crouched, a revolver in his hand pointed straight at him.

Without breaking stride, Loomis groaned, "Oh, hell," as he launched himself toward the man. Hempstead fired, the bullet snatching at Loomis's sleeve before ricocheting from the concrete ceiling just as Loomis's one hundred sixty pounds flattened him into the dirt, the gun flying.

Loomis rolled and came up clutching Hempstead's collar.

"Where's the money?"

Hempstead spat dirt. "On the train," he said dully.

So were the two men he'd hired to rob the bank. Annie recognized the suits and the shoes. The shorter one had a mustache.

The air conditioner in the squad room window groaned as though the night air were giving it indigestion.

Loomis slumped in a chair in front of Zink's desk, Annie beside him.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

There had been statements and assistant district attorneys and gold-badged police officers and silver-haired bank officials, and Loomis was tired.

Annie nudged him. "You're a hero, Loomis. When the Chief Sleaze of the bank comes down to shake your hand, you've got it made."

"Maybe I'll go into real estate," said Loomis wearily. "I don't think they shoot at you in real estate."

"The world's yours, kid. By the time the media get through, you'll have a dozen offers, all for more money, but if I were you, I'd hold up the bank for the manager's job and a fat raise and stick with it."

Loomis winced. "Don't say hold up the bank."

"Let's not be so sensitive. The sleazes are held up every day by other sleazes, only they call those transactions bad loans. And they do some holding up of their own, like waiting a week to credit accounts with cleared checks."

Zink slid into his chair, a sheaf of papers in his hand. "I'm hungry. How about you two? I can send out for something."

"Forget sending out," said Annie, "unless you can get kryptonite on whole wheat toast. I told you Superman here is a health nut. He won't eat the junk we mortals do."

Loomis closed his eyes. Twice today he'd faced a gun. Once he thought he was going to die, and once he almost had. He could have easily been killed there in that dirty tunnel, gone in an instant, which wasn't very pleasant to think about after the way he'd made it a point to take care of himself.

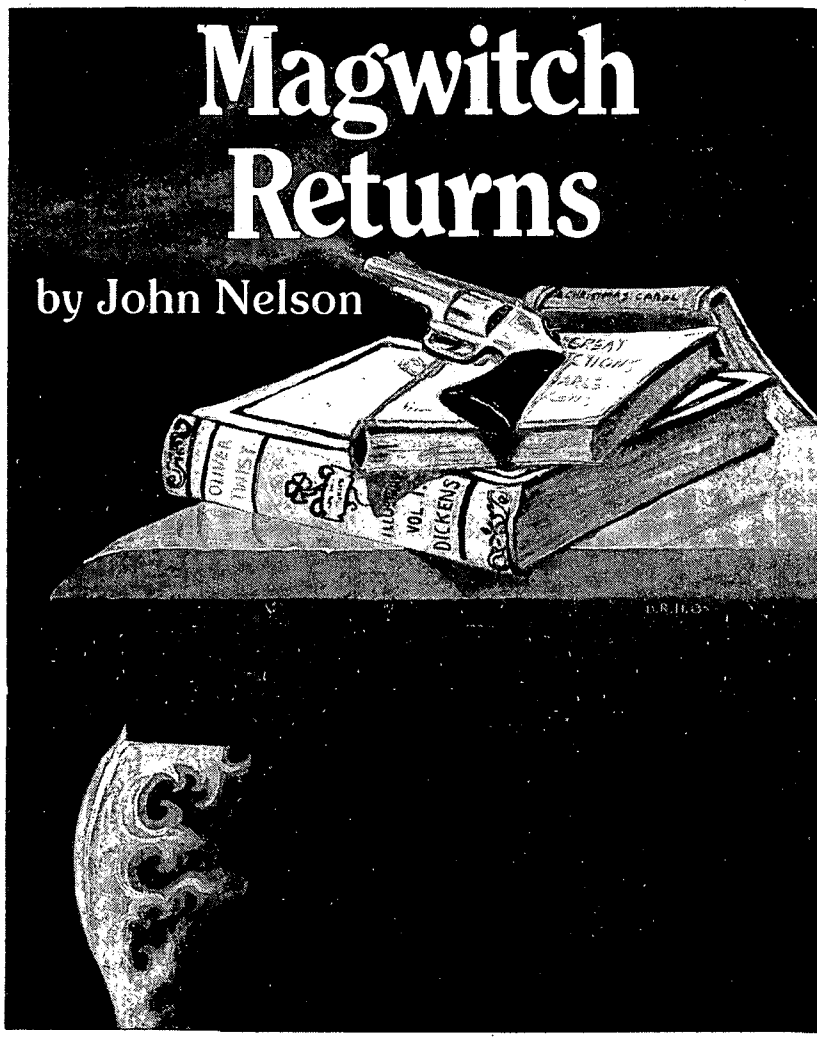
"I'll have a couple of well-done hamburgers with fried onions, a large order of french fries, coffee with extra sugar, and two tickets to Atlantic City," he said.

Annie stared, smiled, and clapped him on the back. "Attaboy, Loomis. I knew you had it in you when you squashed Hempstead while he was shooting at you, but don't overdo it. Living dangerously is one thing, suicide another. Forget the fried onions."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Magwitch Returns

by John Nelson



He was my first suicide victim. I had only been on the force two weeks when my partner Allan Hyath and I got the call. A neighbor in an apartment across the hall heard the shot. He rushed out into the hall and pounded on the door, but there was no response. The door was locked

Illustration by Daniel R. Horne

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and he was about to break it down when the landlord, who had also heard the shot, came panting up the stairs. The landlord unlocked the door and they discovered the body sprawled in an overstuffed chair, a bullet in his head, and a .22 pistol on the floor near the body.

When we arrived, the two men were trying to keep curious neighbors out of the doorway. They had thrown a coat over the trunk and head of the body. Allan and I worked our way through the crowd and into the room. Allan said nothing to the two waiting men, but strode to the body, jerked off the coat, and studied the corpse carefully.

I took one look at the bloody head and turned away. I couldn't understand how Allan could look at it so closely without emotion. But then there was much about Allan I couldn't understand. He was a small man with watery brown eyes and short-cropped, dishwater-blond hair with at least three cowlicks and no natural part. In two weeks of working with him daily, I had never seen him comb his hair or even look in a mirror. He was always quite clean, but otherwise he seemed oblivious to his personal appearance. He never took part in any of the normal precinct camaraderie, and the other cops rarely noticed him. Yet when they did, they treated him with a surprising degree of respect. On our patrols, between the family fights, the car accidents, the robbery reports, and the other oddly mundane aspects of police work, Allan talked almost totally of books, everything from the latest mystery thriller (he found it tedious) to the latest works on evolution, a field he found fascinating.

While Allan studied the room, I tried to clear the hall of onlookers. Then I turned back for a look at the place myself. It was a small living room with a sliding glass door in the far wall that opened onto a patio. To my left was a tiny dining table and, beyond a bar that formed a half wall, a narrow passageway between the appliances that served as a kitchen. To the right a hall extended to what I assumed was the bedroom. Looking again at the living room, I was struck by the rows of bookshelves that filled nearly every wall. Other furnishings were sparse. With the exception of the chair the victim occupied, the only other piece of furniture in the room was a crowded metal desk. On one side of it sat a small bust of Charles Dickens, in the middle was a typewriter with paper still in it, and between and around these were at least a dozen neatly stacked piles of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

books and papers. Behind the desk was a break in the wall of books, a space nearly overwhelmed by a large radio receiver.

Allan was now openly admiring several of the deceased's books, and I decided it was time to take a closer look at the body. Prepared for it as I was by then, I still couldn't look at it long. Even a small caliber gun can make quite a mess when fired at point blank range into the side of a man's head. The body was that of a man in his late sixties, partly bald, frail, and too thin to have been in good health. I turned to the landlord. "What was this guy's name?"

"Andrew Thornton."

I glanced back at the body. "Any idea why he might do this?"

He shook his head. "None at all."

"I do." The across-the-hall neighbor, still standing near the doorway, turned to face me. "Two weeks ago Andy discovered he had Parkinson's disease. He'd been pretty depressed since then. He told me his doctor said that with exercise and medication they could slow the progress of the disease. But Andy couldn't face the idea of the inevitable results."

"Were you two close friends?" I asked.

The neighbor shook his head. "No, not really. Although to be honest, I may have been his only friend. In two years I never knew him to have a visitor. He didn't seem to mind, though. He had a couple of interests that kept him busy."

"Dickens and criminology." It was the first time Allan had spoken, and he caught us both by surprise. I turned to see him studying a book that had been lying beside the typewriter.

Allan continued. "He has quite an impressive library here in both areas." He looked at me. "Did you notice the radio frequency?"

I gave him a puzzled look. In reply he switched on the radio. The room was immediately filled with the crackle of a police radio, broken by the voice of Lydia Smith, one of our dispatchers. Allan switched it off. "What about the note?" He nodded towards the typewriter.

"Note?" Fighting a rising sense of foolishness, I strode to the desk and read the paper still rolled in the typewriter. " 'I've lived the best of times, I've lived the worst of times, but I never anticipated this. I hope those who come after me observe the twists in their own lives more carefully.' "

I met Allan's gaze, but I was not prepared for his next comment. "I've checked the patio door. It's locked from the inside.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

You want to check the windows for me?" Without waiting for a reply, he turned to the neighbor and the landlord. "Did either of you pass anyone in the hall or hear any sound coming from this room before the gunshot?"

The neighbor's head shot up as if he had been slapped. "Of course not. You don't mean that you think . . . What are you talking about? This is clearly a suicide. The door was locked, the gun is next to him, there's a suicide note in the typewriter." He stopped abruptly and shook his head in obvious disgust.

Allan nodded, then turned back to me. "Go to the car and call in the detectives. This may not be a suicide."

I stared at him blankly. "I don't understand, Allan. What are you thinking about?"

In reply he leaned over the desk and tapped a daily appointments calendar and then the book nearest the typewriter. "Look at these."

The appointment calendar was blank for today's date. I flipped the page. In large block letters were the words, "Don't miss the first spirit." I looked up at Allan, but he simply shrugged. I picked up the book. It was a copy of *Great Expectations*. I thumbed through it. Twenty pages in was a sales slip, apparently doing duty as a placemark. I looked at it closely and then back at Allan.

He nodded. "It's now ten forty-two A.M. The date on that sales slip is today. Can you tell me why a man would buy a four hundred and forty page book literally minutes before he was going to kill himself?"

We took our lunch at twelve thirty in a Taco Shack on Eighty-third. It was a run-down greasy spoon operated by an Italian with no sense of irony. For reasons he never made clear, it was one of Allan's favorites. Halfway through lunch we were joined by Joe Martin, one of the detectives who had relieved us earlier that morning. Joe squeezed his two hundred twenty pounds into the seat beside me and gave us a crooked smile. "I saw your car out front and thought I'd stop and fill you in on what we found," he said. "You know, it sure is lucky you spotted that sales slip, because without it this thing would certainly have gone down as a simple suicide."

I glanced at Allan and wondered what he thought about his "luck."

Joe continued. "Anyway, we went to the bookstore and asked around. Now get this. When Thornton bought that book this morning, he said he was taking

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a long trip and needed something to read. But he didn't say where he was going, his neighbors don't seem to know, and we can't find any tickets or anything else in the apartment to tell us where he was going. We did find one thing, though, the name of his lawyer, Charles Teller of Teller, Brown and Hopkins."

Allan's eyes lit up. "Rather high-priced lawyers for a man who lives in a cheap apartment on Forty-fifth."

Joe nodded. "That's what I thought. Anyway, I'll see him this afternoon and see what he can tell me. I also talked to Thornton's doctor this morning, and that bit about Parkinson's disease checks out."

Allan nodded as if he'd known it would. "Anything else?"

Joe shook his head. "Just the lousy routine stuff next, checking every blasted travel agent in town to see if Thornton had reservations with any of them. You don't have any ideas to help me there, do you?"

Allan cut him off with a wave of his hand. "Hold on a second, Joe." He slid out of his chair and returned a moment later with a phone book. Flipping it open to the yellow pages' listing for travel agents, he ran his fingers down the names while he spoke. "What do we know about this Thornton fellow? He's a police buff, he's also a fanatic Dickens reader. In fact, the book he bought this morning was *Great Expectations* and—" He paused and then started laughing. "Try this one." He pushed the phone book across the table to Joe and jabbed his finger at a listing. "Pip's Travel Service."

Joe shook his head. "Why there?"

"Pip is the protagonist in *Great Expectations*."

Joe shook his head. "If you ask me, that's stretching things. But," he smiled, "you really *are* good at that. I'll check it out." He stood up to leave. "If you come up with any other great ideas, let me know."

Allan laughed. "Sure thing. Do me a favor, though. Let me know what the lawyer says."

As Joe took his large frame out the door, I turned to Allan. "Well, what do you think?"

Allan raised his palms as if to say "Who knows." "I'm still trying to figure out why a man with two copies of *Great Expectations* would buy a third."

We finished our lunch in silence. Allan seemed preoccupied, and I was hesitant to disturb him. The rest of the day was routine. At four thirty we heard from Joe. Allan had picked the right travel agent. Thornton was scheduled on a flight to Perth, Australia, on

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

June ninth, almost three months away. From Perth he was taking a bus south to a small town named Busselton. He had made the reservation just that morning.

Joe had also met the lawyer, Charles Teller. Teller knew nothing about a trip, but he did have some interesting comments about Thornton's will. Apparently Thornton had no relatives, was something of a recluse, and lived off investment income. Where he had originally picked up the money, Teller didn't know, but Thornton's estate was worth over a quarter of a million dollars. Finally, it was left entirely to the city university to improve its English literature department. But there was one catch: the will was valid only if another agency did not lay claim to the estate within twenty-four hours of Thornton's death.

When we returned to our car, Allan sat behind the wheel for nearly a minute before starting the engine. Then abruptly he turned to face me. "Let's take another look at that apartment," he said.

When we arrived, Allan began to study the shelves. "What exactly did that note say again?" he asked.

I shook my head. "Short of going back to the station and rereading it, I can't tell you exactly. But it was something like 'I've seen the best of times, I've seen the worst, but I never expected this' or something like—hold on. I see what you're after." I turned to a bookshelf and began to skim through the titles. I quickly spotted a copy of *A Tale of Two Cities*, opened it, and began to read the first page aloud. " 'It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness.' " I thumbed through the rest of the book. There were no marks, and nothing was inserted. I looked up at Allan, puzzled. "Does he have any more copies of this book?"

Allan nodded. "Yes, I've spotted at least two others, but I wonder. How did that note end?"

"Something about how he couldn't foresee the twists in his life."

"Bingo!" Allan had pulled out another book. It, too, held a sales slip. He held up the book so that I could see the spine. *Oliver Twist.* Then he handed me the sales slip. "A book wasn't the only purchase Thornton made this morning," he said. "He also rented a meat locker for the next six months."

On the way back to the station, Allan asked me to review the facts for him. I took a moment to collect my thoughts, then began. "Well, we have

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

what appears to be a suicide, but with some weird twists." Allan chuckled, and I shook my head. "No pun intended. Thornton was a police buff and a Dickens fanatic. He leaves a suicide note quoting *A Tale of Two Cities* and making an oblique reference to *Oliver Twist*. He has reservations to fly to Australia and take a bus to someplace called Busselton. He has an appointment tomorrow with the first spirit, whatever that means, and he rented a meat locker this morning before killing himself, besides buying a book that he already had two copies of." I paused. "I guess that's it. And if it makes any sense to you, you're one up on me."

Allan slowed for a stop light, glanced at me, and grinned. "I'm not sure I've got it all worked out yet, but when I do I'll call you. Are you going to be busy tonight?"

His question surprised me. "No, why? What do you mean, you're not sure what it means *yet?*"

Allan ignored my second question. "Can you meet me at the station at twelve thirty?"

"Twelve thirty! Tonight? For heaven's sake why?"

"I'll tell you tonight, when I'm sure."

I shrugged. "Okay, Allan. I don't have the foggiest what you're up to, but I'll be there."

Allan never called me, but when I arrived at the police station at twelve thirty-five, I found him and Joe Martin waiting. Joe was as curious as I, but all Allan would say was that we were going to the bus station. We arrived there at twelve fifty-three. As we climbed out of Allan's car, he headed straight for the entrance, but Joe and I held back. Allan stopped and looked back at us impatiently. "Well?" he asked.

Joe coughed. I knew we were thinking the same thing. "Look, Allan," I said, "I know you've got some great surprise here, and I hate to ruin it, but as you well know, being a cop isn't the safest job in town. Before we go waltzing into something that involves an investigation of a possible murder, we—"

"There was no murder. Andrew Thornton committed suicide, a carefully planned suicide."

"Then why did he buy a book, rent a meat locker, and make plane reservations?" Joe was skeptical.

"I'll tell you in a minute. But we must go now or our beloved police department may be out of a great deal of money." With that, Allan turned and strode to the bus station entrance without looking back.

We followed him through the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

doorway and down the line of storage lockers until he came to Number 69. He stopped, checked his watch, and scanned the surprisingly crowded depot. A bus had just arrived, and several dozen people were milling around, claiming luggage, and greeting relatives. When Allan spotted a slender, middle-aged man in a three-piece suit, he nodded. As the man joined us, Joe looked at him dumbfounded. "Charles Teller?"

Allan nodded and turned to me. "I would like you to meet the first spirit."

Teller smiled and drew a key out of his vest pocket.

"That is the key to locker number 69, I assume," Allan said. Teller nodded, and Allan continued. "And in that locker is an updated will, leaving some of Thornton's estate to a law enforcement agency, most likely ours."

Teller nodded again; then he unlocked the door and withdrew a brown folder. "To be specific," he said, "it leaves half of his estate, roughly one hundred twenty-five thousand dollars, to the local police department for updating its equipment and for additional officer training. The remainder of the estate goes to the university, as stated in the first will."

Joe looked from Teller to Allan and shook his head. "How did you know?" I asked Allan.

Allan smiled, relishing his accomplishment. "It wasn't too difficult once I fully accepted the obvious, that Andrew Thornton killed himself and there was no murder. As long as we suspected murder, we were looking for clues to lead us to a murderer, or at least to a motive. But none of the evidence did that. Yet if Thornton killed himself, then all the clues were left intentionally for only one purpose, to lead us somewhere he didn't want to tell us about directly. In other words, a sort of game.

"Now what were those clues? A reservation on a flight to Australia, an appropriate destination since the clue that led us to the travel agency came from *Great Expectations* and the benefactor in *Great Expectations* was sent to Australia. But why didn't he stop there? Why the bus to Busselton? Clearly, something was important about the bus, hence this." He looked around him at the depot. "Next, the meat locker. Renting the locker, again, made no sense at all unless you looked at it in terms of a clue in a game. Combine it with our bus and what do you have? *Meet locker bus.* So here we are, meeting at a locker in the bus station. But which locker and at what time? The locker is the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

same number as the date Thornton was scheduled to fly to Australia, June ninth, or 6-9, but more important, it's the date of Dickens' death, June 9, 1870. And the time. His appointment for today was to meet the first spirit. By now it was clear the clue would come from Dickens. What else could it refer to but the three spirits in *A Christmas Carol,* and what was the only group of three persons in this case?" He nodded at Teller, then answered his own question. "Teller, Brown and Hopkins. And like the first spirit, he appeared at one A.M."

Joe broke in. "And of course the earlier will told you that the locker would probably contain a new will. Since he had two interests and his original will left everything to the furthering of only one of those two interests—"

"Exactly." It was Teller. "I wasn't sure what Mr. Thornton was planning when he had this new will drawn up and left directions for it to be used only if a policeman met me here at one A.M. on the day after his death, but I didn't realize that he was planning suicide. In hindsight, I guess I should have. Anyway, once he did I felt I should go along with his last wishes."

I began to laugh. "In other words, the police force had to prove itself worthy of the money, or it would all have gone to the university. Well, Allan, if you don't get a promotion out of this, I'll be stumped. What other cop can claim he saved the department a hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars?"

Allan gave me an ironic smile. "You know, I'm not so sure. I wonder if there isn't a final joke in this on us all. Remember, the original key to almost all of this was the book *Great Expectations.* But the benefactor in that book, a character named Magwitch, was also a convict who returned illegally from Australia. Consequently, all his money was forfeited to the crown. I almost hate to look, but if we do some digging in Thornton's past—"

Allan was interrupted by a rotund man in a plain blue business suit. "Excuse me, but I have a strange message from Edward Thornbush, alias Andrew Thornton, that I was to meet a lawyer named Charles Teller here." He looked at each of us questioningly. "My name is Howard Albus, and I work for the IRS."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE MYSTERIOUS PHOTOGRAPH

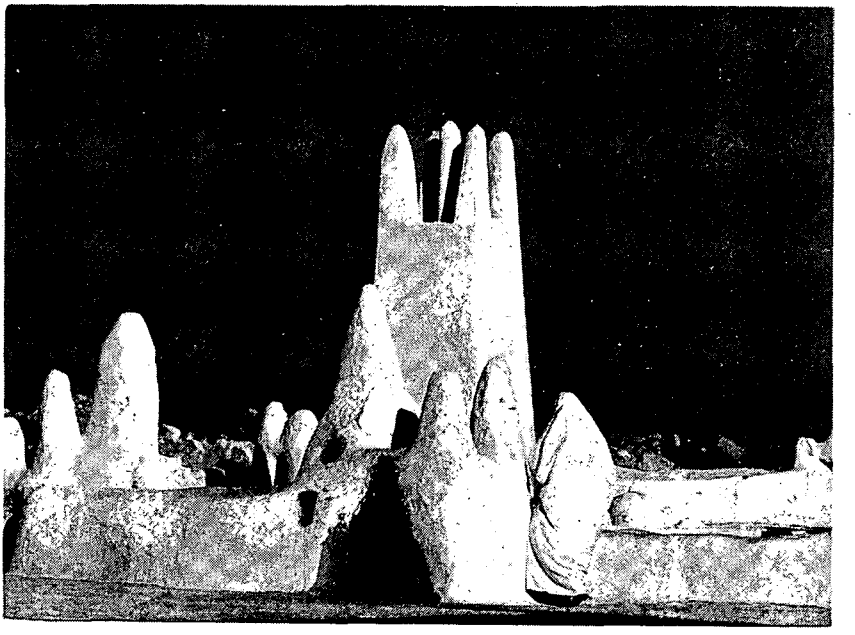


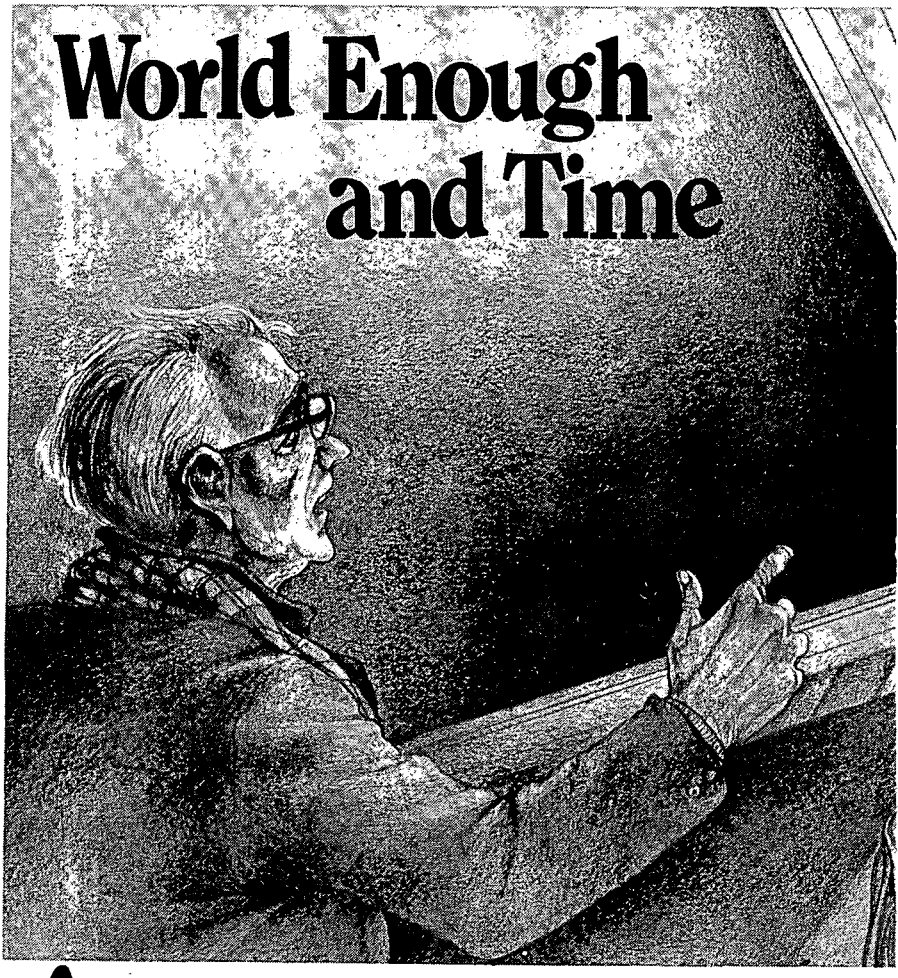
Photo by Thomas J. Abercrombie. Copyright © 1973 by the National Geographic Society.

Footprints in the sand . . . We will give a prize of $25 to the person who invents the best mystery story (in 250 words or less), based on the above photograph. The story will be printed in a future issue. Reply to Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine, 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, New York 10017.

The winning entry for the December Mysterious Photograph will be found on page 155.

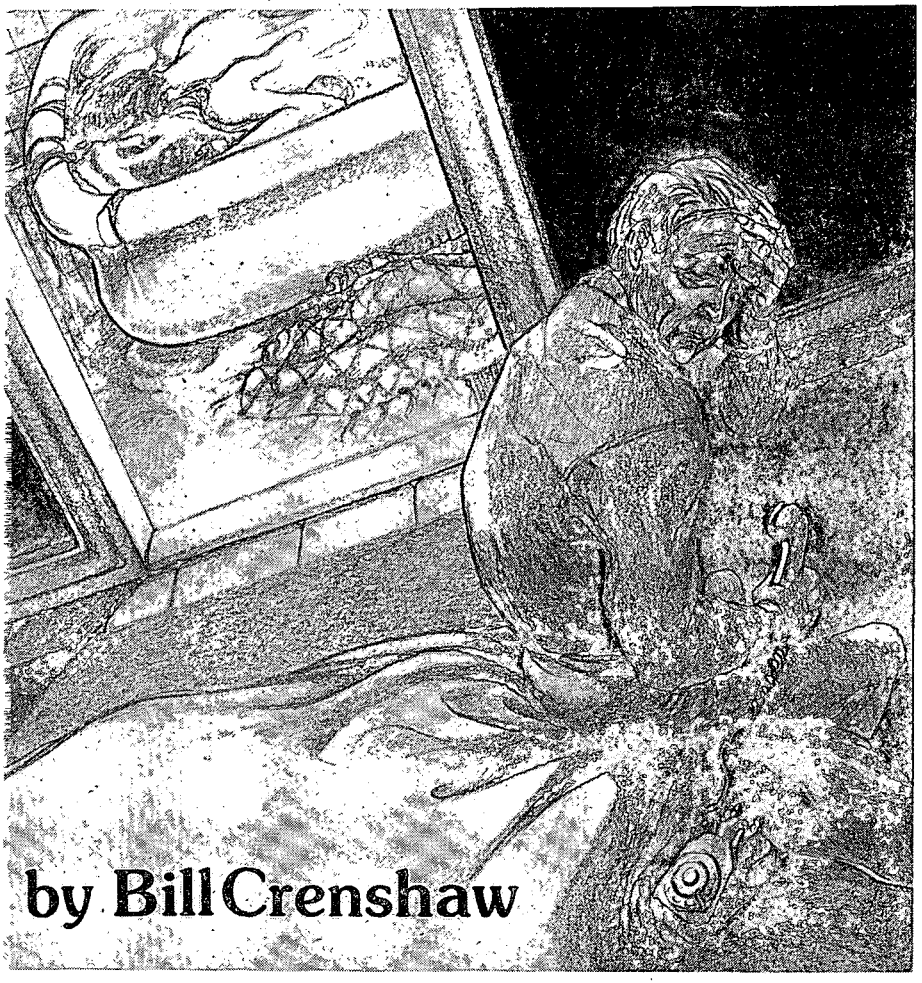
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

World Enough and Time



Adameus Clay rolled over stiffly and opened one eye. The ceiling wouldn't come into focus. He opened the other eye, but the ceiling remained flat and without feature, a white infinity, blank, shadowless, maddeningly unknowable. It could have been six feet or six miles above him, and the disorientation made him light-headed. He strained to find a blemish to give him proper perspective.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



by Bill Crenshaw

There. A strand of spider's web. Things snapped into focus. The ceiling was solid and six feet away and the morning more pleasant now, the early sunlight gold across his bed.

Sunlight?

He had overslept. No, the clock said six thirty. Then the clock was wrong. The sun hadn't been that high at six thirty in a month. It looked more like seven thirty, and it was a good twenty minutes

Illustration by Judy Mitchell

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

through traffic to school and his eight o'clock Old English class. He could just make it if he hurried.

He swung his feet to the cold floor and was struck by several disagreeable sensations—a slight dizziness, some nausea, a most definite headache. He leaned forward but couldn't stand. He tried again, but something held him down. It was Ginger, pulling at his pajamas.

"Adam," she said, half-awake, "what are you doing?"

"Overslept," he said, concentrating his energies on pushing himself all the way out of bed. "Clock's wrong. Look at the sun." He was on his feet somehow, staggering toward the bathroom.

He fumbled for the light and heard Ginger laughing gently. He put his head back into the bedroom and glared. The sun set red-gold sparking from her hair. He couldn't think of anything to say.

"Get back in bed," she said, patting the mattress.

"We need a new clock. I can't have my mornings rushed."

"The clock is right," said Ginger, sitting up, drawing knees to chin. "I set it back. Spring forward, fall back? End of daylight savings. And it's Sunday. No school. Now back in bed."

Adam frowned, swaying slightly. She frowned back, swaying in rhythm. "A wee bit too much to drink at Roddy's last night?"

"Roddy's?"

"Halloween party?"

"Party?"

"Oh, surely not *that* much to drink."

Suddenly it all came back. "Oh, the party, of course." Then he reddened slowly, beginning with his neck and ending with the tips of his too-large ears. "Oh," he said. "The party."

"The distinguished Dr. Clay with a Sunday hangover. Oh, what a falling off was there." Her laugh was rich and pure. She patted the mattress again.

Adam crawled into bed, tried to chuckle, failed. "I feel fine," he said. He was too embarrassed to look at her. He *had* drunk too much at that ridiculous party, but he hadn't been *drunk,* not really. Tipsy maybe, but not drunk. He peeked at Ginger from the corners of his eyes. She caught him and laughed again.

"I remember everything," he said, not quite sure it was true.

Ginger turned on the radio. "English Breakfast or Earl Grey?" she asked, lifting his big reading pillow from the floor.

"Earl Grey," he said. She disappeared into the kitchen. He lay

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

back, desperate to remember anything foolish he might have done. Ginger could just be teasing, of course, she was like that, she'd do that. "I wasn't really drunk, you know," he called.

"Is that a question?"

He decided to drop the subject.

He wasn't sure his stomach was up to tea and toast, but he couldn't admit that now, had to show that he felt fine, appetite good. But it would be nice to lie in for a long, quiet morning.

Then he heard the double thunder of tiny running feet. The twins were awake and charging. He rolled over and pretended to be asleep, but they leapt into bed and crawled over him, wrestling and tickling and squirming, and finally he gave up and popped the covers over his head and popped them down and up and down and up again, trying to play with arms alone, not trusting his head to sudden movement. The twins thought whatever he was doing was hilarious. Through their giggling he heard the phone ring and Ginger's "I'll get it" and he went limp, feigning sleep again, and the twins resumed their attack, using his stomach as a bouncy-horse, reminding him of the virtues of moderation.

At some point he was aware of Ginger in the doorway, face pale, voice trembling. "It's Roddy," she said. "He says Effie is dead in his bathtub. He wants to know if you can come over."

The twins tugged at his pajamas, trying to get him to play. The smell of burning toast filled the room.

The rock was the size and shape of a wedge of pie and it dug into Adam's palm. He leaned close to the kitchen door window again, again saw nothing. He drew back his arm, hesitated, looked around as if something could tell him what to do. Then he swung his arm forward and smashed the pointed end of the rock through the lower left pane, lost his grip, and the rock hit the floor, bounced, slid across the tile with tumbling splinters of glass. The noise startled him.

He reached inside the broken window and opened the door.

"Roddy?" he called.

Still no answer. Glass crunched underfoot.

"Roddy?" Louder.

No answer. No answer now, no answer to the front doorbell, to the knocking, the calling. No time to wake neighbors, to find a phone. Adam fought images of what might be wrong.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He just doesn't hear me, that's all.

He moved through the swinging door into the dining room.

"Roddy?"

Empty, except for clutter from the party, glasses, filled ashtrays, potato chips on napkins, chairs oddly grouped. Maybe he just wasn't home, maybe he left for some reason, to get a doctor, be with somebody.

If he were anywhere, it wouldn't be out here, it would be in the back.

Into the living room. Even more cluttered, more chaotic, so unlike Roddy, or so unlike the Roddy he had known, the Roddy before Effie Botts.

If he's anywhere, Adam told himself again, *he's in the back.*

"Roddy," he called, almost angry.

Into the den. Cluttered and empty.

Then into the hall, a long hall, three doors opening off each side. Too much house for a bachelor professor near retirement, too much house for one old friend. The house had been Roddy's only indulgence.

Into the study, first door on the right. Empty. Impossibly neat. It had been locked at the party, protected, *sanctum sanctorum.*

Adam reached for the door across the hall, but he knew he was only delaying what he must finally do, what he should have done already. If Roddy were anywhere, he'd be in his bedroom, last door on the right, and if Effie really were dead in the tub, she'd be in the bathroom adjoining. And if Roddy had done anything to himself, he'd be there, that room.

Adam started down the hall.

"Roddy?" Silence.

He stopped just short of the bedroom door. Water was trickling somewhere, in the tub, he could hear it. The carpet was saturated and stained dark, and it gave like a sponge underfoot, water rising around the edges of his shoes. He didn't want to go any farther, afraid of what he might find, of what he'd see in the tub, what he might see in the bedroom, unless this were some elaborate Halloween trick, some sort of joke, please, a joke he'd never forgive.

"Roddy?" he called once more.

"Adam?"

It was Roddy's voice, distant and vague. Adam stepped to the doorway and saw Roddy sitting on the far edge of his bed, back to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the door, telephone still in his hand, looking over his shoulder, looking suprised, as if Adam had magically appeared. In the bedroom, to Adam's left, the bathroom door was open. Adam entered the bedroom, walked through the water, walked by the open bathroom door fighting the urge to look in, an urge that repelled him even as it drew, and he was unable to avoid seeing peripherally a flesh-colored shape against the stark ceramic white as he passed.

"Roddy," he said gently, taking the receiver from Roddy's hand and hanging it up.

Adam called an ambulance. He didn't know what else to do. It was clear when he went in to turn the water off that Effie Botts was dead, face down, hair spread wide and stirring in the unseen eddies and clogging the overflow drain, pale body so beautiful and fragile and now looking so small.

"Is she dead?" Roddy had called, and Adam had come out of the bathroom and called the ambulance. Then he sat on the bed beside Roddy, staring straight ahead, feeling Roddy beside him, waiting for him to say something.

Neither spoke until the doorbell rang and someone tried the doorknob and knocked. "I'll get it," Adam said.

The paramedics took one look at Effie and asked how long she'd been that way. Adam said at least forty-five minutes. They were sorry, they said, and they radioed for the coroner. Then they politely but firmly suggested that Adam and Roddy go to the kitchen and have some coffee or something, so they went, and Adam filled the pot and dumped the water in the drip maker and tried to find the coffee, but it wasn't where it was supposed to be. Things in the kitchen had been rearranged since he had last poked around, rearranged by Effie, he guessed, and he had to ask Roddy where the coffee was.

While the coffee was dripping, Adam started sweeping up the glass. A paramedic came in and asked him to stop. "It's better to leave everything just like it is," he said. "I need to ask some questions, okay?"

Adam looked at Roddy, but Roddy gave no sign that he had heard, sitting at the kitchen table, staring down at his fingers. Adam looked back to the paramedic. "I'll tell you what I can."

"Who called the ambulance?" said the paramedic, his pen hovering above his metal clipboard.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I did," said Adam. "What happened to her?"

The paramedic looked up, frowning. "That's what I was going to ask you."

Adam explained that Roddy had called him after it happened. "I think he found her after his walk. He always takes a morning walk. He's dressed for the walk, see? Roddy? Did you find her after your walk?" He heard himself talking too loud, as if Roddy were hard of hearing.

Roddy nodded.

"Do you know what happened, Roddy?"

Roddy turned toward him a face of such pain that Adam had to look away.

The doorbell rang. It was the coroner. The second paramedic showed him to the bedroom.

"Could you tell me the name of the patient?" the first paramedic asked.

The word "patient" seemed to Adam strangely inappropriate. Effie wasn't a patient. But she wasn't a person, either, not any more, wasn't Effie, wasn't anything. What else could he call her? Victim? Too harsh, disturbing. Patient, then. A euphemism, comforting, maybe the right word.

"Botts," he said. "Effie Botts."

"Age?"

Adam didn't know for certain. Mid-twenties. He gave his own name since he had called the ambulance, no, doctor of philosophy, not M.D., and no he didn't know the name of Effie's father. Then he realized that the paramedic meant Roddy, and he didn't know what to say. He cleared his throat. "That's Dr. Davis Roderick," he said. "Also doctor of philosophy. He's not her father."

"Husband?" The paramedic's voice was flat, free of curiosity and of judgment, interested in facts only, in doing the job. The pen was poised.

And again Adam had no right word. Husband? No, there had been no wedding, no ritual, no legal or spiritual declaration of relationship and commitment. Teacher? He was that, and more, much more, too much more. Lover? No, too hot, too Latin, didn't fit, and he couldn't have said it in any case. What word defined here? What could he say?

"Husband?" the paramedic repeated.

"No," said Adam.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The paramedic wrote something down. Adam wanted to ask him what it was so that he could have the word. He didn't dare.

The paramedic got addresses and phone numbers and other details of fact, told Adam again he was sorry, advised him to stay with Roddy for a while, said that the coroner would probably have more questions later but doubted it would go to a formal inquest or anything.

"Young girl like that," he said, shaking his head. "One slip in the tub . . . The home is a dangerous place, Dr. Clay."

He told Adam to come back to the bedroom if he had questions or needed anything. Adam said he'd bring them some coffee when it was done. The paramedic said thanks.

The coffee maker seemed horribly slow. Adam finally just took the pot, and the last few drops of thin coffee from the filter cone danced and sizzled on the warmer. He put a cup in front of Roddy and was relieved when Roddy's hand closed around the cup and lifted it to his lips. He stayed a few minutes to watch. Perhaps things could be handled after all. Perhaps everything would be all right eventually.

By the time he took the paramedics their coffee, the coroner had taped a strip of fluorescent orange ribbon slantwise across the bathroom door. "Police Line," the ribbon said. "Do Not Cross."

It was routine, the coroner explained later, talking over coffee like a neighbor who had popped in for a chat. Standard procedure in any unexplained death. She probably slipped, hit her head, drowned. Even if there'd been signs of trauma, some bruises or cuts that showed how she'd fallen, he probably would have sealed the room anyway, maybe the house. But there was no way to know what happened until an autopsy. "A basal skull fracture might not show even under X-ray," he said, putting the palm of his hand across the back of his head just above the neck. "So, really, this is all SOP. Nothing to worry about."

Then why, Adam thought, *are you making me so nervous?* Why talk of basal skull fractures? She hadn't fallen backwards. She was face down, head toward the front of the tub, as if she'd been sitting and just sagged forward. She couldn't have hurt the back of her head, unless someone had hit her . . . Is that what he meant? Did he suspect that?

No, Adam thought, *surely not.* He was being polite, was trying

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to reassure, to explain procedures, to remove mystery just by sitting at the kitchen table and showing them that this strange disruption was normal, that every morning it happened somewhere to somebody, that you could still sit and drink your coffee, *had* to sit and drink your coffee, take out the garbage, grade your papers. *He's just trying to help,* Adam thought, wishing that he were helping more.

Adam looked at Roddy but couldn't tell if Roddy had heard anything. The coroner drained his cup and stood, and Adam reached out and shook his hand. "She never knew anything," the coroner said. Adam thanked him.

The police were not so polite. There were two of them, one with a red tie and one who lit one cigarette from another. They were not happy with the situation whether it happened to someone every morning or not. They seemed suspicious of everything—the broken glass in the kitchen, the delay in calling the ambulance, the lack of trauma on the victim's face and head, the blood in the hall which everybody finally realized had dripped from a cut across Adam's palm. He hadn't noticed. "You're really screwing this up for us, pal, you know that?" the chainsmoker said.

They wanted to know about the living arrangement, the locked doors, the body when Adam had found it. They showed him greenish snapshots that the coroner had taken in the bathroom.

"Was the scene just like this when you found it?"

"Yes."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes."

"Where'd all the water on the floor come from?"

"The water was still running when I arrived. Just a little trickle. I turned it off."

"Then it wasn't just like this when you found it."

"Yes, but the water was on."

"Let's try it again. Look at the pictures carefully this time."

And the pictures somehow made it real because they were so unreal, so ghastly with their bad color and their dull edges and the bright reflection of the flash smeared on the tile above the tub. That was Effie lying there, Effie Botts, who had been one of the brightest students he had ever taught, who had been living with his best friend, a man almost two and a half times her age.

"Sorry to put you through this," said the cop with the red tie to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Roddy, "but what if she didn't slip? What if some nut broke in and killed her while you were on your walk? We need exact details now. Later you start forgetting the details and the house gets cleaned and they're lost. It won't take much longer. We're just doing our jobs, okay?"

But Adam felt throughout the questioning that their jobs included suspecting something unseen, and that he was part of that suspicion. It made him feel naked and unwashed.

Everybody finally left, taking Effie Botts.

And the day dragged on somehow, mindless and mechanical, following the arc of the sun. Adam helped Roddy clean up, blotting the water from the bathroom floor, then the rug in the bedroom, then the hall. Water had run all the way under the door to the basement, dribbled through the film of dirt on the wooden stairs and trickled to the sump in the concrete floor. Roddy started down, wiping a step with a clean white towel, backing down, wiping the next step. Adam said it wasn't necessary, that the stairs would dry. Roddy moved down to the next step. "Be careful," Adam said.

In the tub Adam found a few blonde strands of hair caught in the overflow drain. He forced himself to pull them free before Roddy saw them, then stood frozen in the middle of the bathroom, not knowing what to do with the hair that lay curled in his hand. He flushed it down the toilet.

Roddy brought up a bottle of twenty-year-old port from his wine cellar and handed it to Adam.

"Why don't you come home with me, Roddy, just for a while. Come and see Ginger, at least, show her you're all right."

Roddy nodded. "Thank you," he said.

At Adam's house, Roddy was quiet at first. He picked at dinner, went for a walk, sat and stared. But at supper he started talking, first about little things, lazy students, the arrogance of the department head, the latest gossip. After supper they opened the port and toasted each other and toasted Effie Botts and Roddy smashed his glass in the fireplace, making Adam jump a little and spill wine on his fingers. Ginger got Roddy a new glass and said again how sorry she was, how tragic an accident, how little she could say of what she felt.

Then Roddy leaned forward and began really to talk, about how he valued their friendship, about being surprised that they were still at the university after all these years, about the article he

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

wished he had finished. He teased Adam about the romance novel he was writing and about his jogging, asked if Adam had any more Fat Chance stories. He and Ginger both teased Adam about drinking too much at the party and being silly, and Adam defended himself, vowing he remembered everything, naming others, graduate students and faculty, who had been more drunk.

"Not more drunk," he said, correcting himself. "Drunk, period. I wasn't drunk." And Roddy and Ginger howled, which was what Adam wanted, glad to be the target of humor to help cheer Roddy, to avoid thinking about the day.

But always in the conversation, Roddy mentioned Effie Botts in some personal, private way that Adam didn't want to hear. He didn't want to know any details and tried to change the subject whenever one came up. But in those details, when Roddy's eyes looked at infinity and he described Effie's standing just so, or the way she always slouched down in the chair for the eleven o'clock news, or how she was always teasing him about his minute-pinching schedules, in those details Adam glimpsed Roddy's grief as if he were walking across an expanse of snow which appeared solid but was only crust that gave way beneath his feet and left him suspended in sudden, frigid air of vast and profound depths. It took his breath away.

And so they sat long into the night, Adam and Ginger letting Roddy talk on as he wished, the conversation moving from the Halloween party to when he and Adam met in their mid-twenties, from Ginger's first semester to Effie's first semester, from praise for the department of old, with its time for real contemplation and genuine scholarship, to scorn for the department of today, slipping with everything else into mindless speed and bumper-sticker philosophy. Roddy fell asleep sitting on the couch. Ginger took off his shoes and she and Adam eased him onto his side and covered him where he lay. "Poor Roddy," Ginger whispered. "What a terrible, terrible thing."

Later, in bed, trying to fall asleep, Adam propped himself up and faced Ginger in the darkness. "He really loved her," he said.

"Yes, he did."

After a few minutes more, he said, "And she really loved him. I mean, really."

He could hear Ginger turn towards him. "Yes," she said. "Very much."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Adam lay back down and stared toward the darkened ceiling. "I never knew that," he said.

Roddy woke at five forty precisely and fixed two pieces of toast and six ounces of orange juice while Adam sat on a kitchen chair smiling and trying to wake up and struggling into jogging shoes. Roddy was unmerciful about Adam's jogging, "a self-destructive fad, unnecessarily hard on the knees," he said, and convinced Adam that a brisk walk was just as beneficial and certainly more enjoyable. "Not to mention," he added, "infinitely more civilized." They set off at six, the morning a little brighter now than the week before, and despite being used to jogging, Adam had some trouble keeping up with Roddy's determined pace.

The walk took over half an hour. Roddy apologized. He had well-planned routes at home, he said, and none took more than twenty-five minutes, which he considered optimal. Adam tried to ignore the morning paper, but Roddy bent and picked it off the lawn as if were just any paper and this were just any morning.

"Coed Found Dead in Professor's Shower," the headlines said. Roddy passed the story across the plate of bacon to Adam, who read only enough to see that the police were withholding the name of the victim until notification of next of kin, and that the professor was named.

He looked up at Roddy. Roddy put another neat little square of waffle in his mouth, eyes flicking to Adam only for a second.

"I wish you'd reconsider," said Adam. "Let me cancel your classes."

Roddy shook his head and dabbed at his lips with his napkin. "Control, Adam, control," he said. "*Carpe diem* and make it your own." He folded his napkin and placed it beside the plate, thanked Ginger again for breakfast, and asked that Adam drop him at his house on the way to school. His first class wasn't until nine, and he wanted to freshen up and change his clothes. He dismissed Adam's protests with a flick of his hand. "I'm going to school, Adam," he said. "Now you go shower or whatever you do."

"He needs his routine," Ginger said later to Adam as she helped him into his coat in the bedroom. "Be supportive."

Adam could understand the need for routine and familiar rhythms and decided that maybe he could help Roddy by encour-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

aging the regular schedules. "Don't forget," he said as he let Roddy out of the car, "tea at eleven, as usual." Roddy gave a tolerant smile.

Then, alone for the first time in twenty-four hours, Adam fell gratefully into his own routine, joined the congestion of traffic pushing into the city, and tuned the radio to a local call-in show. The traffic jams took his mind off Roddy and Effie until he realized that the on-the-air telephone calls weren't about the state of the nation or the economy or pornography, but were about Roddy and Effie Botts. "What I want to know is," whined one caller to the host, "just why was that coed even *in* that professor's shower?"

They fed on the story with obvious joy. By the time he pulled into the faculty lot, Adam was convinced he had an ulcer.

Standing in the lobby of his building, clustered with a dozen others at the elevators, he felt no better. It was all anyone talked of. The police might not have released the name, but it was no secret that it was Effie Botts living with Davis Roderick. Adam waited at the back of the crowd, turned away as if reading the directory on the opposite wall.

English 723 was something of a relief. The students read "The Wanderer" aloud in Anglo-Saxon, then struggled with their translations. Nobody said anything about Effie Botts.

But it was there in the halls after class, and when he was waiting again for the elevator he saw Clara Joyce Sizemore backing Garrison Shoals into a corner, her hand clutching at a lapel, his mouth moving in quiet answer to the questions Adam heard rising across the lobby: *"Who's* been living with him? . . . I didn't know that. . . . Nobody tells me these things. . . . That's disgusting." Shoals looked his way. Adam ducked into the restroom, ashamed of his cowardice, but C. J. Sizemore was more than he could face.

Adam missed Roddy between classes. He stayed in his office from nine to ten, grading at papers, avoiding the halls. Once he heard laughter from the teaching assistants' office next door and caught something about sex by stopwatch or appointment and something about her wearing out the old man, not the other way around. He opened his door so they would know he was there and would shut up.

He saw Shoals again at eleven at the outdoor cafe tables. "Sorry I abandoned you," Adam said as he set his briefcase down beside the white wrought iron chair.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"All is forgiven, Mouse," answered Shoals, using Adam's Tea Party nickname. "I would have done exactly the same thing."

The air was warm for late October, but with enough nip to make Adam uncomfortable as the others carried their steaming cups carefully to the table and sat, talked, joked, smiled as usual. Adam was both relieved and disturbed, glad that things could chug along after all, disturbed that they could chug along with so little effort and that the ever-punctual Roddy had not yet appeared. But when Roddy did arrive, the table fell silent, and when conversation picked up, it was sombre and awkward.

The Tea Party broke up early. Adam stayed at the table with Roddy in long silences. "Are you doing okay?" he asked at one point.

"Did you know," Roddy answered, his eyes on the dry fountain and leaf-filled pool around it, "that someone called me a dirty old man? Out loud, in class." He glanced at his watch and rose. "The head has summoned me."

"See you later?" Adam called to Roddy's back. Roddy nodded without turning around.

Ten minutes later, on his way to his noon class, Adam heard in the halls, electric with the rumor, that the first autopsy had been inconclusive, that the medical school's chief forensic pathologist was conducting a second autopsy, and that while whatever had killed Effie Botts was unknown, it was certainly not a fall in the tub.

Adam cancelled his class and tried to find Roddy.

Adam stood by the cash register gripping his tray tightly, looking for a place to sit. The cafeteria was hot, low-ceilinged, filled with steam and noise. Someone bumped him from behind and soup swirled out of his bowl and ran down its sides, thin and greasy.

"Excuse me," Adam said. The student pushed by him, silent.

He hadn't found Roddy, and it was too late to go home for lunch, so he found himself in the Student Union, *terra incognita*. He felt himself a trespasser. This was the students' territory, and they were raucous, like migrating blackbirds taking over a town, and full of sure and exaggerated movement, heady with freedom and numbers.

In the far corner he spotted a section that faculty apparently had

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

staked out. He threaded his way to it and sat between two empty chairs.

He was still uncomfortable. The faculty and the few grad students were from other departments. He thought he knew some faces, and one or two names floated by, but they were all strangers.

He ate slowly, and as he sat, he began to feel protected by his anonymity and the din around him. Here he wasn't obliged to make conversation, be polite, meet people's eyes. Here he could concentrate on nothing, on eating, on the act of lifting spoon to lips. It was a relief to leave thought outside, waiting like an impatient relative. He took his time.

A coed's laugh lifted clear above the general hum and buzz, and in it he couldn't help hearing the laugh of Effie Botts, couldn't help seeing her bouncing as she did when she walked, full of playful energies, always slightly and attractively irreverent, as if everything amused her, even she herself.

Effie had hung on Roddy too much at the party, Adam thought, but then seeing them together always made him feel as if he were witnessing something he shouldn't. Roddy had played host with his usual open earnestness, giving tours of the wine cellar and the new greenhouse with great seriousness, and as if the house were hers, Effie had played hostess, smiling and sparkling, her hand too often and openly in the crook of Roddy's stiff arm.

Adam realized that he was staring off blankly, and he dipped his spoon back into the soup. A voice behind him cut through the noise. "Heartless bastard," it said. "I heard he met his nine o'clock this morning. Can you believe that?"

Then Adam found the noise resolving into intelligible words, phrases, sentences, and everything concerned the death of Effie Botts—jokes about the affair, the living together, the shacking up; nasty comments about youth and age and old goats and chicks, about grade-grabbing women and dirty old men, about the teacher-student relationship, about Oedipus and Electra.

"Maybe they just loved each other," a girl said, and others laughed.

And he heard the new rumors about the cause of death—heart attack, stroke, suicide, murder, rape and murder, an accident of kinky S&M stuff, drug overdose. A voice said something about God's will like AIDS for living in sin; other voices shouted him down.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Adam couldn't eat. He picked up his tray and pushed his way out of the labyrinth of tables and people, noise and vapors. He dropped the tray onto a conveyor belt and watched it curve out of sight through a small square window hung with strips of rubbery cloth.

That night, Effie Botts led Eyewitness News.

Adam and Ginger watched the bright-eyed anchor describe in puzzled but determined tones the confusion over the cause of death. "Dr. Roderick has had no comment, Brad," said a pretty on-the-scene reporter to the anchor, a shot of Roddy's house over her shoulder. "The police won't confirm the story of a break-in at the Roderick home earlier today."

They spent almost five minutes on shots of the campus and reactions from students; shots from the state capital and Representative Houck posed on the capitol steps, assuring the cameras that he would personally visit President Candler when he returned to his district and that he would in no uncertain terms inform him that the good people of his district would not stand for such conduct in the university which they paid for with their hard-earned tax dollars; shots of the patrons of Laura's Lounge, eager to jail somebody.

Brad the anchor promised updates as they happened and expected an announcement shortly from the medical school.

"He's at home," Adam said. "He's just not answering his phone. I should go there."

Ginger nodded, biting at her thumbnail as she stared at the dog food commercial.

Adam rang Roddy's doorbell and stepped back, holding his hat in both hands before him. He could hear the hall telephone ringing. He stepped forward, pressed the bell again, stepped back.

Again nobody answered, and again Adam felt welling panic, like Sunday morning, only now maybe Roddy *had* done something to himself, and now it would be too late to say he was sorry, to explain his uncharitable thoughts, his doubts. *I should have found him this afternoon,* he thought fiercely. *I should have tried harder.* And he pounded on the door with his fist and called Roddy's name. He imagined Roddy stretched out, dead in despair. He pounded again.

The porch light snapped on, a ghastly no-bug yellow. Adam stood

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

with his fist raised, pinned by the light. There was a fumbling with locks, and the door opened. Roddy squinted into the light at Adam.

"Why don't you answer your phone," Adam snapped, pushing past him.

"Adam, what *is* the matter?" said Roddy, taking Adam's hat and coat.

The phone rang again. "I've been trying to call," said Adam, pointing at the telephone as if accusing it. He snatched up the receiver. "Hello," he barked, staring at Roddy defiantly, setting his jaw, then feeling his jaw loosen as he pulled the phone away from his ear, as if the filth pouring from it could somehow get on his skin or clothes. Roddy took the receiver and hung it up.

"I don't answer it," Roddy said, taking Adam by an elbow and steering him back to the study. "There is a rather large reservoir of hate out there." Roddy closed the study door against the ringing and sat Adam in the leather reading chair and poured them both a glass of port. The study was no longer neat.

"I couldn't find you today," said Adam, and it sounded whiny, like a protest. He apologized, but Roddy just smiled and nodded and told him about being chewed out by the head, who had himself been chewed by the dean. The dean wanted to know what the hell Roderick was doing on campus, had said it was bad PR and that he had already gotten calls from more than one friend of the university in the capitol, and he wasn't having it. He had hoped the head understood what he meant.

"Grover understood," said Roddy. "I was to go home, to keep a low profile. And he said that I am to keep my hands off female students in the future." He tossed back his wine.

"Roddy," Adam began, but Roddy waved him quiet, dismissing the remark as if unimportant. Adam knew otherwise.

The calls were vicious or were reporters, so he had just let the phone ring, had gotten used to it finally. Then somebody had tried to break in through the back door. Roddy had shouted and heard someone run out, hadn't seen him. Now the police were watching his house. "They think someone may try to kill me."

"Who?" Adam demanded, outraged.

"One of my lovely callers? One of those fiery guardians of whatever it is I corrupt? Or maybe, as the cop that smokes, you remember him, maybe as he put it, 'the deceased's ex-honey?' "

"Sloane Lusk?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"He also said it may be some nut wanting a souvenir."

Roddy's study was suddenly alien, and Adam wanted to go home. "I don't think you're safe here," Adam said. "Stay with us again tonight." Roddy smiled and shook his head. Adam phoned Ginger, hoping that Roddy couldn't turn her down, but he did, gently, lightly. The conversation sounded oddly casual. Adam saw a pillow and blanket on the couch and realized that Roddy was going to sleep that night in his study and that Roddy's bedroom was familiar no longer, was as alien to Roddy as the study was to Adam.

"Thank you for coming," said Roddy when he hung up, and Adam knew that Roddy was ready for him to leave. He insisted that Roddy call at any hour for any reason and shook hands and left. He saw a man in the car across the street, recognized the cop with the red tie. When he got home, he was exhausted.

They watched the eleven o'clock news on the black and white portable in the bedroom. The second autopsy said that Effie Botts had died from heart failure, from ventricular fibrillation caused by electric shock. She had probably grabbed a blow dryer or something similar. It was a common and tragic accident. The coroner took the sad occasion to remind viewers to keep all things electrical far away from bathtubs.

"Should I call Roddy?" Adam asked.

Ginger shook her head, her face silvered by the light from the television. "He wouldn't answer. Not with all those nuts calling."

"Maybe now they'll leave him alone," he said. "Maybe now he can get some sleep."

But all Adam could see as he lay trying to sleep in the dark was an image of the bathroom as he had seen it the morning before, and there was nothing around the tub, absolutely nothing, that Effie Botts could have grabbed.

The policeman with the red tie was waiting at Adam's office door at eight the next morning.

It had been bad enough to spend a sleepless night twisting in the covers, wondering what the coroner's report meant. It had been worse to hear the radio call-ins hiss and sneer at the coroner's report and the unanswered questions. "Old perverts are all the time doing young chicks," said one. "What's the mystery?"

And now this, now this policeman leaning against the wall outside his office, hands in pockets, as patient as stone. The policeman

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

pushed himself off the wall as Adam approached, stuck out a hand, asked him if he'd mind coming down to the station to answer a few questions. "I've already spoken to your boss," he added, as if that would cinch everything.

"My boss?"

"Department head."

The idea of Grover Hickman as boss struck Adam in his weariness as delightfully ludicrous, and he laughed in spite of all efforts not to. He knew it was terribly inappropriate, but knowing that made it funnier somehow, or more bizarre or desperate, and though he gained some control in the elevator, it was not until they were halfway across town that he was able to stop completely, being suddenly chilled by the 10-codes and the voices of cold efficiency squawking from the police radio, its black microphone lying like the head of a snake on the seat between him and the detective.

They didn't come right out and say they suspected Roddy, not in so many words. They just wanted to go over the details again, get the time sequence down right, show him the pictures and get him to describe just what he had done, just what he had seen. They never asked, "Was there anything in the bathroom that could have electrocuted Effie Botts," they didn't even focus on the bathroom, but they always came back to the bathroom somehow, asking the same questions in different ways, bothered by exactly what bothered him—how Effie Botts had been electrocuted.

They went over it all again and again, asked him to think, to be careful, to be certain. What time did Roddy call? Was he sure? Was the front door locked when he got there? When he let in the paramedics? Was he sure the back door had been locked, not just stuck? Was he sure the back was deadbolted and the front just night-latched? Was the water still warm in the tub? Had he touched the body? Had the body been in exactly the position in the picture when he found it? Had anything in the bathroom seemed out of place? Anything in the bedroom out of place, hair dryer, electric razor, anything? What had the party been like? Anybody drunk? Rowdy? Angry? Threatening? Had Roderick and the victim been on good terms lately, no spats? What about the ex-boyfriend? Reputation for short fuse, how did he behave? Was he still in love with Botts? Botts with him?

"Tell me about the bathroom again," said the red tie. "Just like you saw it."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Somebody gave Adam a cup of machine coffee with sugar and pretend cream, watery and metallic, and it burned his tongue and he swore, all of his anger and exhaustion at the surface now. "The coroner said accidental death," he snapped. "What do you want from me?"

That made Chainsmoker restless, but Red Tie leaned forward, polite, even friendly. "Facts, Dr. Clay, that's all. The coroner's new, good on bodies, green on scenes. Rousted out of bed early Sunday morning, he's bound to overlook something. Girl gets shocked in tub, fair enough." He picked up a clipboard, leafed through papers. "Says 'Path of significant tissue damage in right arm consistent with passage of electrical current. Point of entry right hand; exit general and diffuse through water in tub.' Fine. All I want to know is, what did she touch with her right hand? She touched something, right? If it's not there now, where is it? It's not in the pictures, so it was moved before they were taken. So who could have moved it? Roderick. You. The paramedics. Or maybe a sleepover from the party, some drunk who crashed in one of those rooms and nobody knew it."

"Now which one of those makes sense to you?" asked the other, smoke leaking from his mouth and his nose with each syllable.

"Not Dr. Roderick," said Adam.

"Maybe it's not murder," said the smoker, impatience clear in his voice. "Maybe he hands her the dryer because she asks him to . . . "

"He was on his walk . . . " Adam began.

" . . . or maybe for a joke. Maybe then he panics and hides the dryer or whatever because he just panics and is afraid so he covers it all up."

"Not Dr. Roderick," Adam said again.

The smoker snorted. "Loyal," he said. "Perfect." He took another drag. "Why you? Why did he call you? Why not us or an ambulance? Make you wonder? Makes me wonder."

At home he tried to tell Ginger how abused and humiliated he had felt, but he couldn't give examples. Something terrible was happening that he couldn't describe, and that made it more maddening. He wanted to call Roddy and just talk, but he couldn't pick up the phone, and that bothered him even more. Ginger called to cancel his classes, and he stretched out in bed and stared at the ceiling.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He had seen Roddy frozen on the bed, phone in hand, had seen Roddy's grief. He tried to find Red Tie's perspective, to see Roddy as accidental or intentional cause of death.

Killer. Accidental or intentional killer.

Impossible. Yet that assumption gave Roddy's actions whole new meanings. *Had* Roddy called him just to have a witness to his apparent shock? Had Roddy killed her by accident, panicked, hidden the lethal appliance, called Adam? It made sense of the facts.

No. He knew Roddy. There were things to consider besides facts.

He felt better. He had never suspected Roddy, not really. But something still felt wrong. There was something else, something about Effie Botts.

She was too young, she was a student, they were living together; had been living together, had been a student, had been too too young, especially too young to die. Why couldn't he name what really bothered him, why he recoiled and was embarrassed each time he thought about them?

He asked Ginger if she knew how people had reacted when he first started seeing her. "They were people," she said. "They weren't always kind. Now sleep." She would say no more.

And then he saw that in Roddy's relationship with Effie he saw the image of his own with Ginger, and that it was his own unexorcised guilt and doubt he was wrestling with.

He called Roddy, but there was no answer.

He went back to the university after supper to get books for class the next day, and looking down across the darkened campus from his thirteenth floor office, he saw a figure sitting on the Burdon Street Bridge, and even from that distance he could tell it was Roddy.

"Hate that," said Roddy as Adam came up behind him a few minutes later.

"Hate what?"

Roddy jerked his head down at the traffic that shot by twenty feet below. "That," he said. "The world outside. The real world." Roddy sat on one of the concrete planters that lined the edges of the bridge with evergreen shrubs and served as guardrails. The toes of his shoes hung over the traffic.

"Why don't you come back with me?" said Adam.

"You know, I think I liked it before, when this was just a two-lane street with a crosswalk, when students held up traffic and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

traffic students." He turned to Adam. "You're surprised, aren't you, Mouse? You're thinking that I am the last person to prefer that intimate contact with the outside world. How much better this is, Roddy must think, the campus isolated, rising above the noise and heat and carbon monoxide of the real world hurrying out of the city it built and builds and hates and cannot wait to leave. How appropriate Roddy must think it, you say, that the city street has sunk beneath the level of the campus and that we stand here on this wide and well-lit pedestrian arch, above it all." He turned back to the traffic, leaned over the edge watching a lone cyclist glide by in the orange and shadowless glow of the streetlamps, leaned far. Adam made a little jerk with his hand and was still.

"Illusion, Mouse," said Roddy, sitting up and staring straight before him. "The change was made for the convenience of the traffic, not the campus, and we grow more protected and superfluous, bent to the will of the world which allows us the illusion of rising above it and which we affect most profoundly on football Saturdays, when it makes its pilgrimage beneath this bridge to the stadium which lies, you'll note, at the very heart of the campus. I hate its intruding here."

"Well, still," said Adam, fumbling for a response, "we are above it, aren't we?"

"They told me who broke into my house." Roddy twisted to look over his shoulder at Adam. "Sloane Lusk. Apparently he thought that I saw him and that he would be caught eventually and that it would be better to turn himself in. He told them at first that he wanted something of hers, a memento of lost love, and that he had broken into my house in some pre-Raphaelite excess of passion. They didn't believe him. They kept after him until he admitted that he was planning to get me. That's what the detective said. 'He was going to get you.' I did not ask what he meant, and he was not happy when I wouldn't press charges. I don't think anyone has ever wanted to get me before . . . " He trailed off, staring.

"Let me drive you home."

"You know, I think she dated me the first time on a dare, really. Just for a lark." He got to his feet, slipped a little, just enough to cause something to lurch in Adam's chest, then he edged around the planter onto the bridge. "Let's go to my house and have a drink," he said, linking his arm through Adam's in a way that would have been as common as a handshake a hundred years be-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

fore. "Let us break open my most venerable port and toast love and friendship, friendship especially tonight. I thank you for not doubting, not condemning. I knew you'd understand, being married to Ginger, having faced the same pressures. Your confidence and support these last days have . . . well. Where's Brunhilde?"

Adam was glad for the dark off the bridge. His face burned with shame.

He called Ginger to let her know where he was, then yielded to Roddy's insistence that he see the wine cellar. "You didn't get a proper tour before," Roddy said as they descended the wooden stairs. The basement was little more than a concrete box with room for the furnace, a sump pump, some storage. It was open to the crawlspace, the walls only as high as Adam's chest. The wine cellar itself was a little closet with controlled temperature and humidity built up off the damp concrete floor.

Roddy uncorked what he said was his best port and ran on about its virtues, and Adam smiled and nodded, not hearing most of what he said. Roddy poured the wine, swirled it, showed Adam how to watch the way it clung to the glass, how to look at color, test the bouquet, roll the first sip on the tongue to get the full taste. Adam followed his instructions, said he liked the wine very much.

"Then you must taste this one," said Roddy, studying the racks and carefully sliding out another bottle. It was good, too, Adam said, and Roddy insisted he try another, and another, and with each new bottle they made a new toast, to friendship, to love, to Grover Hickman, to Chaucer, and opened bottles lined the narrow shelf and sat on the basement floor, and Adam started to feel a bit woozy.

"All of this amazing wine," said Roddy finally, weaving a little. "It's art, really. One should share art." And he gave a little laugh and picked up two bottles and crossed the basement and poured them into the sump, got two more and kept pouring until the sump filled and the float tripped the pump and the wines were sucked through the black plastic pipe and spat out somewhere in the dark. Roddy's laugh was forced and disturbing, and he started filling the sump again. Adam tried to stop him by unplugging the pump, pulling both plugs from the socket set high in the cinder block wall, and Roddy grabbed the wrong cord from him, saw it was wrong and pulled at it angrily. The cord trailed off into the darkness of the crawlspace, and Roddy pulled harder, then harder still, and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

something gave in the dark and flew past Adam's shoulder and smacked onto the concrete floor. It was an appliance timer, its plastic housing cracked, its liquid crystal display blank.

Adam stared for some seconds before he went cold. Then he demanded a flashlight, yelling at one point, and somehow he had gotten up into the crawlspace by the time Roddy found one. He felt water seep through the fabric at his knees as he crawled back into the dark; he found the second cord, the one that had been plugged into the timer. His flashlight traced it from the dirt up to the floor joists where the two strands separated, traced one strand to where its insulation was stripped and the bare copper taped to the cold water line, traced the other to its bare copper taped to the drain from the bathtub just above the point where the steel pipe joined the plastic.

He called the police, asked for Red Tie by name, Detective Werner, surprised that he remembered it and that Werner was still at work. When the detectives arrived, they asked for Dr. Roderick and wouldn't let Adam say anything until he took them to Roddy sitting in the kitchen as he had been on Sunday morning, staring blankly at the cup of coffee in his hands.

"We found this," said Adam, holding up the timer by its cord as if it were a dead rattlesnake.

"Just a minute, please," said Werner, raising a palm as Chainsmoker began reading Roddy his rights. "We want to talk to you separately."

"I don't understand," Adam said.

"Dr. Roderick is under arrest," said Werner.

"For murder," said Chainsmoker, smiling at Adam before he continued reading from his Miranda card.

Adam set his coffee mug down on the television and turned up the sound and called Ginger. It was the same tape they'd shown at eleven the night before, an on-the-scene shot from inside the police station, with camera crews, police, and reporters reflected in the plate glass windows as Roddy was led through the doors and into the tilting lights and shadows. Roddy flinched away from the outthrust microphones. The camera weaved in close and Roddy's face filled the screen, whitened and bloated. The camera pulled back, and Adam caught a glimpse of himself in the background, escorted by Werner.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The cameras followed them through the lobby and started after them down a corridor. Werner turned to block the way and the pretty reporter planted her feet and closed her report with the suspect disappearing into the darkness over her shoulder.

"Very dramatic," Ginger said, her voice brittle.

At the police station the night before, Adam's last glimpse of the reporter had been from behind as he went down that hall, her body silhouetted against the lights, her hair glowing like a halo. Then they had taken him through a door, sat him at a desk, taken Roddy through another door. Later Werner came back and said he could leave, but if he didn't mind waiting they'd have questions after they did the paper on Roderick.

"I *insist* on waiting," Adam had said, and Werner took him to the room where he had been questioned before. He waited, wishing he had called Ginger, reluctant to open the door and ask for a phone. He found his nervousness and confusion changing into anger, and by the time Werner and the smoker had come back and had finished questioning him, he had questions of his own. Werner was polite with Adam's demanding tone; the smoker was hostilely amused.

They said that finding the timer had only moved things up, that they already had the warrant. "But we wanted him Mirandaed before he talked about the gizmo," Chainsmoker said. "We wanted everything admissible. Such great timing."

Adam said he didn't understand.

"What's to understand? Amazing grace, how sweet the sound. He finds this gizmo just when he needs it? What a coincidence."

"I found the timer. Roddy didn't even know what it was."

The smoker stared. "You from Mars? He took you down there, right? If you hadn't found it, he would have, with you there to see his surprise. You're a patsy, pal. You're muddying the water." Werner remained silent, watching.

What about fingerprints on the timer, Adam wanted to know. Oh, they had prints, the smoker said, more than one set, and they could be anybody's. "You want everybody to keep their prints on record? Make my job easier, I can tell you."

"But you took Dr. Roderick's fingerprints, didn't you?" said Adam, brightening. "You won't find them on the timer."

In the silence that followed, Adam thought he had scored a point, but then Chainsmoker had laughed.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Werner smiled as if in spite of himself. "We don't expect to find his prints, Dr. Clay. If he is the murderer, he'd take precautions. If he isn't, they won't be there, either."

Adam saw the logic and was embarrassed.

"Finny here's assuming the gizmo is the weapon," Chainsmoker continued. "I think it's a plant. Maybe if things had gone right, no gizmo needed. Let's say you kill her by tossing a hair dryer in the tub. First autopsy says accident. Great, leave it there, who needs something crazy like the gizmo? But then people raise all kinds of stink and there's another autopsy and finally we're looking at electrocution but no mechanism because you forgot and took it out, didn't want fingerprints on it or something, whatever, but now you've got to do something. So you rig up the gizmo in the basement, no prints, bring a friend in, fix things so he finds it, and here we are."

"Sorry, Dr. Clay," said Werner. "It fits. Think back on it and you'll see. Sorry he's your friend, but there's a girl dead here. Maybe you can think of something you haven't told us."

Adam felt he should do something. All he could do was protest. "But he couldn't kill her. I know it. He loved Effie Botts."

"So did a lot of people," said the smoker.

"Come on, Ray," said Werner.

"Everybody says what a wonderful person she was. Forget that she's shacking up with a man as old as her grandfather, everybody thinks she's perfect. Well, what I want to know then, Mr. Professor, is who killed Miss Perfect? Give me a better suspect than Roderick."

The smoker's anger surprised and frightened Adam. Werner seemed uneasy but willing to let things go on.

"Have you talked to her old boyfriend?" said Adam, and hated himself because he didn't mean it, was using one person to save another.

"You think we're just talking to you here?" said the smoker, lighting a fresh cigarette from the stub of another. "He's carrying the torch for Botts. He knew she'd get tired of the old man and come back to him, back to her own kind. He asked her about coming back at that party. She said she'd think it over. Know what I think? I think she thought it over and decided to leave and I think that she told Roderick and he killed her. This thing with Roderick wasn't natural. That kind of thing always ends up bad."

"What if you assume something else?" said Adam, desperate.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"If you assume that Roddy killed her, it all fits one way. What if you assume that Roddy *didn't* kill her? Doesn't it all fit another way then?"

"How?"

"Well," said Adam, "wouldn't that mean that the timer really was the murder weapon?"

"Fine," said Werner. "Now, who else would want her dead, Dr. Clay?"

"Okay," said the smoker, "say it is the weapon. Roderick sets it up, goes on his walk. Later he 'finds' it so we don't suspect him. Any way you cut it, here we are. It all comes back to Roderick, professor."

"But," said Adam, "couldn't it be a . . . "

"Setup?" The smoker snorted. "Try that with his lawyer, pal, try it in court. We're not a jury. We're just cops."

And Adam could hear in the smoker's voice contempt for lawyers and for professors, and that as much as anything allowed the weight of the day to grind down. He asked if he could go home. Werner, ever polite, said he would drive him. He got home in time to see himself and Roddy entering the police station on the eleven o'clock news, and it was as if he were suddenly beginning the night all over again, caught in an endless loop of questions and answers and ineffectual protests.

He heard someone talking to him, realized that it was Ginger and it was morning and he was standing in front of the television in his bathrobe. She was telling him to get back in bed, that he hadn't slept well, that she was going to call him in sick. She handed him the paper and his coffee cup and pushed him toward the bedroom. He didn't argue.

The newspaper had a page one picture of Roddy entering the station. Adam could just see himself in the background, recognizable by glasses and hat. He read the stories, the releases from the university, the reaction of the man on the street, comments from politicians, pronouncements from leagues of decency. They all thought that Roddy was guilty of something.

They're wrong, Adam thought. They don't know him. They're making poor assumptions. Assume that someone else killed Effie Botts. What does that imply about who? how? why?

He knew the how. The timer. Effie reached for the tap, completed the circuit. The timer was there and waiting. That implied that

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the who had access to the basement, which meant anybody at the party. *Fifty people,* he thought with alarm, maybe more with all the dropping in and out. Too many possibilities.

No, maybe too few. Fifty people, but who hated Effie Botts enough to kill her? He could think of no one. But there were many at the party he didn't know.

And even if one of them did hate her that much, why go through such an elaborate method? Why not just hit her on the head and have done with it?

Adam shuddered at his thoughts, but he couldn't stop.

Whoever it was must have planned the murder, gone to the party, set up the timer. Which meant he had been in the house before the party. And to get the times right, he'd have to know habits, know when Roddy walked every morning and when Effie bathed, know intimate details that no one should know, perhaps could know, except Roddy and Effie.

Which made Roddy the likely candidate once again. It all comes back to Roderick, Chainsmoker had said.

This wasn't doing any good. It was too depressing. He'd take a bath, a long warm bath with a paperback, and he'd put it all out of his mind.

But even with the water splashing and stinging his feet and steam rising and fogging the bathroom, his mind was back in Roddy's basement, in Roddy's cold, cold bathroom. He could not form an image of Roddy as killer, but that assumption made the pieces fit. With that assumption, the timer was probably a ruse, like Chainsmoker said, a ruse that wouldn't have been needed had the first autopsy been accepted. It was only because Effie Botts was young and Roddy was . . . older . . . that they even bothered to look a second time. If it had been Roddy instead, Adam thought with a rising sense of outrage and impotence, if it had been Roddy himself dead in the tub, they would have said heart attack and let it go at that and people would make jokes about it, laugh about the dirty old man who wore himself out on a girl young enough to be his granddaughter, and the men on the street and the radio call-ins and the leagues of decency would say that it was no less than he deserved, that he should have stuck with his own age, his own kind, that things had a way of righting themselves when man tried to pervert them.

No, he thought, they wouldn't have said anything because it

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

never would have made the news. Sixty-three-year-old professor of English dies of heart attack in tub. No story there. What could be more natural?

If I died in the tub right now, he thought, wouldn't they automatically assume a heart attack, look close enough to confirm the assumption, go no further? Wouldn't they find exactly what they looked for? And let's face it, I could die anytime, heart, stroke, a slip in the tub, and leave Ginger, leave the twins.

Maybe they're right. Maybe Effie Botts would have been better off with her own kind. Maybe Ginger would be better off with a husband her own age, not somebody who will be dying before her eyes before long. Maybe it should have been Roddy in the tub. Then Effie Botts could cry for him and grieve and go back to Sloane eventually, her own kind, where she belonged.

He lay back, wincing in hot water. He raised the paperback and read the first sentence over and over until he finally understood it. The second sentence was easier, the third easier still, and he settled into the story.

Then, quietly, shapes shifted, patterns emerged, and Adam lay breathless, afraid that what he saw would slip away if he so much as moved. He lay there as the water became still and grew cold around him, lay thinking delicately about what he saw until Ginger gave a sharp, impatient rap on the door.

"Don't do this to me," she said, relief and anger in her voice.

"Eureka," said Adam, suddenly shivering. "I know how Effie Botts died." He reached for a hand and Ginger helped him out.

"You mean whether it was an accident or murder?" she asked, handing him a towel.

"Yes," said Adam. "It was both."

The detention floor was in the newest wing of the station, but to Adam that evening as he waited for Roddy it smelled of flaking paint and ancient steel. The air was warm, almost hot beneath the narrow ceiling grate, but everything else was cold.

Finally Roddy appeared with a guard at the last set of bars. A sergeant behind the raised counter to Adam's left pressed a button somewhere and the bars slid back. Adam shook Roddy's hand and thought that Roddy looked used up, empty.

The sergeant handed Roddy a plastic bag filled with those pos-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sessions they had taken from him less than twenty-four hours before and made him look through them all before signing for them. Adam asked if they could leave another way. He had seen the press gathering at the main entrance. The sergeant called someone to take them out through the garages to the parking lot. In a narrow stairwell on their way down, they passed Werner and Chainsmoker with Sloane Lusk between them, his hands cuffed behind his back. Nobody said anything as they edged by each other.

As he drove Brunhilde through the Wednesday night traffic, Adam tried to explain to Roddy what had happened, how he had gone to the police with his new assumption and waited as they checked the fingerprints on the timer with the ones they had taken from Sloane Lusk when he turned himself in, and then waited and waited while someone issued new warrants and authorized Roddy's release. He explained that Sloane Lusk hadn't been careful about fingerprints because he never expected the timer to be found, never expected a police investigation, never expected Effie Botts to die. Everyone had assumed that Effie was the intended victim. She wasn't.

"You were, Roddy," he said at a stoplight. Roddy stared straight ahead. The light changed.

And as Adam explained, he saw Sloane Lusk sitting by the phone on Sunday morning, waiting for the call from Effie Botts, the frantic, hysterical call begging him to come quickly. "Roddy is dead," she'd say. "He's had a heart attack." "Have you called an ambulance," he'd say, as if concerned, and he'd jump into his car and rush to her aid, and she'd see how she couldn't have abandoned her own kind, see that the thing with Roddy wasn't meant to be, and soon the grief would pass and soon she would love him again.

But the call never came. What must he have thought as he sat there, Adam wondered. Sloane was certain of their schedules, knew not only Roddy's legendary rigidity but its details, the walk at six, the breakfast at six thirty, the shower at seven, every day, even when it rained. Maybe Effie Botts herself had joked about the schedule with her friends when she was dating him on a dare, for a lark. So, Sloane thought, Roddy would shower at seven and die, and Effie would call him sooner or later, and he'd have plenty of opportunity to retrieve the timer at his convenience. Did he get any sleep that night, Adam wondered, or the next morning as he sat waiting for the call? Did he finally fall asleep by the phone that

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

afternoon, wondering if something had gone wrong, thinking that nothing could go wrong because the device was so simple? And when did he hear the news? And when did he realize that he had killed Effie Botts and that he had killed her because that night daylight saving time ended and he hadn't set the timer back?

So on Monday maybe Sloane *had* wanted to kill Roddy, like Chainsmoker thought. Or maybe he was going after the timer. And after that the house was watched.

Adam pulled into his driveway. Roddy gave no sign that he heard anything. He went inside with Adam, spoke when addressed directly, thanked Ginger and Adam for their various kindnesses, and disappeared into the guest bedroom. He was still asleep when Adam peeked in before leaving for work the next morning.

There were newspeople on campus when he got there, the pretty reporter herself, live in front of a minicam, using the leaf-filled fountain as backdrop. "Dr. Roderick is in seclusion at an unknown location," Adam heard her say as he passed, and he smiled.

When he went home for lunch, Roddy was still asleep. But when he got home at five Roddy was awake and something of his old self, and they made fresh tea and complained about the cold front moving in. At six thirty Roddy asked Adam to take him to the office so that he could get some books.

The campus was almost deserted in the early evening dark. "Let's take a walk," Roddy said before the elevator reached the lobby, so they pushed the glass doors open against the wind and turned their collars up and walked across the wide plaza and onto the Burdon Street Bridge. The orange light glowed from the street below, and leaves clattered and clicked by, spinning on their edges. Roddy stopped at the crest of the bridge and looked up at the clearing sky.

"It is ironic," he said after a long silence, "that we both loved her and we both were accused of killing her."

Adam had no reply.

"It would have been a year New Year's," said Roddy, "a year since our first . . . " He waved his hand in the air as if reaching for the right word, then lowered it slowly and put it back into the pocket of his overcoat.

It was cold. "Let's go get the books," Adam said.

Roddy laughed, a sudden unsettling outburst that echoed across the bridge when he stopped. He turned to Adam and laughed again.

"Forgive me, Mouse," he said. "I was just thinking. It was the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

fourteenth of February when I told Effie that it was no good. I thought I was in love, but I wasn't sure. Maybe I was only old and foolish. Maybe foolish, but old for certain, too old for her, I thought. I told her I was flattered and grateful and said all of those perfectly stupid things I wanted so desperately to avoid. And do you know what she did? She sat me down, very sternly and seriously, and recited to me, just as if she were speaking, she recited 'To His Coy Mistress' as if I were the coy mistress. And she was right. Just now I could see her frowning and pacing and lecturing."

And Roddy paced and frowned before Adam. " *'Had,'* " he said, raising his eyebrows, spreading his hands, " 'we but world enough and time, this coyness, Davis, were no crime.' She always called me Davis."

And he was laughing again, laughing, Adam knew, at the joy of the memory.

"We knew it could all end any second," Roddy said. "We always knew that." He looked out across the bridge. "Do you know what she would say, Mouse? She'd say, 'Well, Davis, we couldn't make our sun stand still, but we by God made him run.' " He turned to Adam. "And we did, didn't we?"

Adam linked his arm through Roddy's. "Yes, by God, you did."

And Roddy smiled, and Adam smiled with him, and the Hallowe-en wind was filled with leaves as they turned for the parking lot and Brunhilde and home.

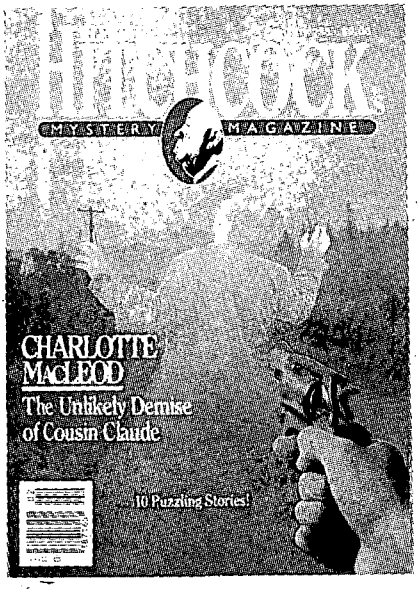
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

SOME PEOPLE WOULD KILL FOR A COPY.

SUBSCRIBE NOW AND SAVE UP TO 24% OFF THE COVER PRICE

CALL TOLL-FREE 1-800-247-2160

(Iowa residents call 1-800-363-2860)



YES SEND ME 12 ISSUES FOR ONLY $15.97

ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

P.O. Box 1932, Marion, OH 43306

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____ Zip _____

DHD6H

Please allow 6-8 weeks for delivery of first issue. Outside U.S. and possessions $19.97 for 12 issues. All foreign orders must be paid in advance in U.S. currency.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

UNSOLVED

by Jerome Meyer

Unsolved at present, that is, but can you work it out?

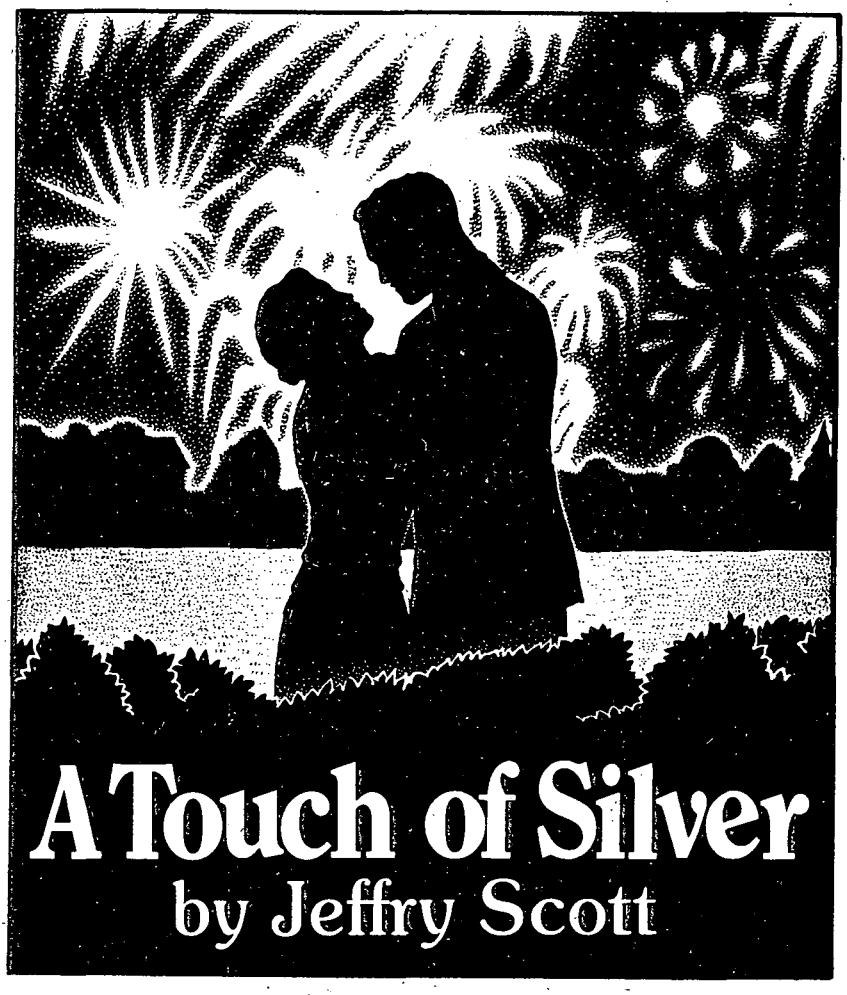
The answer will appear in the May issue.

This is not a new problem but it is very interesting nevertheless. Three men registered in a hotel and asked for three separate rooms at $10 each, so the clerk received $30 from the three men. The next day the clerk found that these three rooms could have been let for $25 instead of $30 so he called the page boy and gave him the rebate to give back to the three men. But the boy, not being as honest as he might have been, gave each man back $1 and kept $2 for himself. Now each man, instead of paying $10, paid $9. This makes $27 for the three men since the page boy kept $2. Now 27 + 2 is 29. Where did the other dollar go to?

See page 133 for the solution to the March puzzle.

"Where Did the Dollar Go?," taken from Puzzle Quiz & Stunt Fun *by Jerome Meyer. Copyright © 1948, 1956, 1972 by Dover Publications, Inc., New York, N.Y.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



A Touch of Silver

by Jeffry Scott

Illustration by Glenn Wolff

Esme Butters had been finding dinner with the Callaghans a fraught social occasion—perfectly horrid was not too strong a term—even before the night of the fireworks turned lethal and seemingly insane. Ghosts are bad enough, murder far worse, but ghosts that can kill . . .

Refusing to give her any sympathy, Inspector Jacques merely laughed coarsely and observed that Miss Butters didn't know

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

when a person was well off. She wasn't in the mortuary or under arrest.

From the start Miss Butters had suspected the policeman of Having No Soul, and now she was positive. "Really!" she fumed.

Inspector Jacques patted her shoulder. Vulgar as he was, he had enough sense not to pat anywhere else. "Yes, really. You're a lousy witness on the surface, but mustard, deep down. Only needed the flowery stuff knocked out of you. You'd have made a ruddy good copper if only I'd caught you young and trained you up."

"Too kind."

Impervious to sarcasm, the lout actually winked at her. "Praise where praise is due, that's my motto." So that's what it was. . . . "We'll have another chat tomorrow, one of my chaps will run you home." Yes, a perfectly horrid evening, to the end.

Esme Butters came into her own as poetess on retiring to Steeple Oaks, long before hearing of Tony Callaghan and his deceptively bubble-headed wife or dreaming of murder in the dark.

From puberty she'd yearned to turn out pale and interesting but emerged as rosy, plump, and a jolly good sort. Her convent school nickname of "Margarine" Butters, dogging her for decades, didn't help the image. Worst of all her verse, though facile and indeed as compulsive as doodling or nail-biting, persisted in rhyming, scanning, and making sense at first glance. She never stood a chance.

Until after a working lifetime as young Arnie Skapgrayce's typist—latterly known as PA to Sir Arnold, chairman of the board—Esme Butters bought Lodge Cottage and returned to her village roots. At least and at last in Steeple Oaks she was a personality. Very big in the parish magazine (everyone agreed that her couplets on local events were ever so clever) and the dramatic society, whose last four pantomimes she had scripted.

It must not be thought that Miss Butters was a fool. Or not wholly one. When the vicar announced that Tony Callaghan and Vera Debree had leased the manor and wouldn't they be pleased at having a fellow writer almost literally on the doorstep, she gave him a sharp look.

Clearing him of suspicion, yet still nettled, she said dryly, "He's a proper writer, or rather, a most improper hack. A professional, that's to say. My prime achievement is the occasional column-filler in women's magazines. *Old fashioned* magazines."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Having no taste for smut, Emse Butters hadn't read any of Tony Callaghan's trio of best-selling *roman à clef* potboilers. But no literate British citizen was likely to escape reading about him—how Tony Callaghan, obscure gossip columnist fired after a Fleet Street libel action, wrote his way out of trouble and into the supertax bracket.

Callaghan, as the famous book jacket portrait insisted, was rakishly handsome. His wife Vera, top model in her day, remained striking. A golden couple—simulated gilt anyway, and that was good enough for TV and the tabloids.

The vicar held a garden party to welcome them to the village. Miss Butters, with a guilty tingle of malice, noted that the photograph was out of date: ravaged rather than rakish was the word now. *Drink, my lad,* she thought, reading the trembling hands and drowned texture of Tony Callaghan's skin.

Malice fled when Esme met Vera Debree Callaghan. She was younger and hid it better, but Vera had a drinking problem, too. Whites of the eyes pinkish, a certain hesitation and precision in speech, and a distinct tang of gin—at three in the afternoon!—cutting through a miasma of delicious, hideously costly scent.

To their mutual surprise, within several days Miss Butters and Vera Callaghan were firm friends. Tony paid a duty visit to the cottage at the foot of the drive, a charming Georgian pepperpot whose porch was rampant with honeysuckle. He had an unfortunate knack of combining the worst of smirk, grin, and leer when addressing females, even to ask the time. "Caw, do you live in this place or sort of wriggle into it after you've showered?" he demanded, stamping about the parlor and making ornaments rattle. "Claustrophobia City! It's bloody tiny, it'd drive me mad."

Vera sent Miss Butters a comically anguished, he-knows-no-better glance behind her husband's back. Esme had already reached the same conclusion. Tony Callaghan was full of himself, naturally gifted in the obnoxiousness line, but there was no harm in him. Not really. In small doses, infrequently repeated.

Miss Butters, unmarried rather than a stereotype spinster—her rueful experience covered some truly *terrible* men—had long since stopped wondering over the husbands quite nice women suffered. Presumably he suited Vera.

Except that Vera wasn't happy. Dropping in on Esme Butters several afternoons a week, she brought her gin bottle and the mixers while Miss

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Butters, allergic to spirits, beer, and wines alike, matched her in tea, without comment. Tony Callaghan drank because he was an alcoholic, but his wife tippled steadily, her hostess gathered, to pass the time and as an emotional anesthetic.

But Vera made no reference to the cause of her malaise and was devoid of self-pity. In fact, she was good company, Esme Butters enjoying the younger woman's contrasting attitudes and radically different model of the real world. Vera had a former model's veneer while making no secret of her North London origins in a slum near a greyhound stadium.

"Dad was a market porter and we don't talk about Mum," she confided cheerfully. In literary matters she was a noble savage, lacking intellectual jargon yet showing good taste—in other words, she and Esme Butters liked many of the same authors.

Once Miss Butters was frowning over a quart of parish pump matters to be squeezed into the pint pot of the six-pages-long church magazine. "Why don't we say . . ." Vera proposed, a trifle slurrily, ". . . and then snip *that* bit out and bob's your uncle, we've cut it by a hundred words, half the length, no danger."

Miss Butters checked herself on the brink of uncivil surprise at such skill. "Not just a pretty face, me. Well, all the time me and Tone were living together, before he got onto the gossip column, he was in the production end of newspapers. You know how blokes 'gas about their work, I just picked up the tricks and shortcuts. . . . It's not real writing, the way you can, Es."

In other areas she was more savage than noble. Miss Butters mentioned that the vicarage was Jacobean, and Vera, showing intelligent interest, inquired, "Now where did the Jacobeans fit in? I never can remember whether they were on Oliver Cromwell's side or fighting for the Cavaliers."

And Vera was superstititious as well as partially uneducated. She believed that the manor was haunted, and only part jokingly, didn't like the idea. Esme Butters was bracing. "What rubbish, dear! Firstly, the manor's little more than a century old, no history to speak of, and none of it gruesome. Secondly, there's no such thing as ghosts."

Later, the night of the fireworks and the invisible assailant butchering Gerry Meadows, Miss Butters remembered her headstrong assurance, and shivered. . . .

In hindsight, Esme Butters kicked herself for being so slow

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

on the uptake. As it was, when Vera's twice-weekly regular appearances became once every two weeks or so, not staying for long, Miss Butters was baffled and hurt.

Vera Callaghan might be flawed and arguably shallow, but Esme Butters felt certain she wasn't unkind. Yet it appeared that having squeezed her new friend dry of local knowledge and modest personal interest, Vera was bored and had dropped her.

Of course Miss Butters wasn't ingenuous, simply a bit rusty after years away from office life where she would have spotted the signs in an instant. During Vera's now-cursory visits, she seemed brighter, fitter, more animated.

Then came the phone call from Tony Callaghan, a quarter-mile away up the drive at the manor. "Put Vera on, please," he said without preamble.

Esme Butters gulped. Belatedly she understood what was going on. More than thirty years' running interference for a beloved boss, not to mention her own discreet affairs, made her reply almost at once, "I'm awfully sorry, Vera popped out." But that wouldn't do, so close to the house, he'd come looking. "Actually I've been very naughty," she lied fluently, "and persuaded Vera to run into Bamford for me. My embroidery wool, you know. I must finish this tapestry tonight, for the church hall raffle tomorrow."

Incredulous, sizzling silence. "I'm tied to the house this afternoon, you see. Waiting for a phone call from my godchild in Australia," Miss Butters improvised. A deep grey lie, not even white: but Herbert had not phoned in seven years so it was more than time . . .

"What did your last servant die of?" Callaghan jeered. "Damned inconvenient, I want the blasted woman. Tell her to get straight up here when she's run your errands, bloody cheek." And he hung up.

Esme Butters, perched on a field gate well clear of the manor drive, heard a car door slam, invisible beyond a bend in the road. Followed by Vera's appearance, hurrying back home. Tersely Miss Butters explained what had taken place.

"You're an angel," Vera Callaghan gushed. "You know how it is, you need to get off by yourself every now and then . . . oh, you deserve better than a con job, Es. Yes, I'm seeing a feller and using you for an alibi. He's lovely, really smashing, I'm a teenager again."

"I think that's all I want to know," her friend retorted stuffily. Though she couldn't help softening, inwardly—Vera Callaghan was an adultress but for the first time in their acquaint-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ance, she was happy, also.

"I shouldn't have put you in the middle," Vera apologized. "Won't happen again. I'm supposed to be taking bridge lessons at Bamford from next week . . . Tony can't abide cards." Incorrigible.

Further enlightenment came by chance in the village store. Miss Butters, a *Treasure Island* disciple, recalled Jim Hawkins eavesdropping from within the apple barrel, although for her it was a matter of being missed behind the paperback rack.

An anonymous, carping male voice caught her attention. "Gerry Meadows is sex mad."

"Naught but sheer envy speaking," Mr. Billany, the shopkeeper, countered placidly. He was a fervent gossip. "Very tasty bit o' goods is Mrs. Callaghan, *you* should be so lucky."

"Huh! Disgusting, I call it. She's old enough to be Gerry's mother."

"Older sister, mebbe," Mr. Billany, pawky but fair-minded, argued. "She can't be more nor ten years older than he."

"Huh! That Gerry Meadows could fall in a dungheap and come out gold-plated. Hired by the day to put a few slates back on the scullery roof, and I hear they have him to dinner now, if you please. Her old man must be dead stupid or off his rocker."

At this point, spurred by her theoretical distaste for both slander and snooping, Miss Butters coughed sternly and rustled the paperbacks. Emerging to see the church caretaker crimson with shame and Mr. Billany blandly courteous as ever. . . .

"What's up, Es? You sounded like death on the phone just now."

"Oh my dear, it's the talk of the village! And Meadows of all people, a *career* philanderer. At least four illegitimate children to my knowledge, *and they're all called Dean,*" Esme wailed.

Vera Callaghan spluttered with laughter. "Sorry, Es, but your face is a picture. I know Gerry's starting price, it's not all down to true love. I'm not that dim, it isn't going to be for life. . . . "

Nonplussed, Miss Butters said, "Very well, but does your *husband* 'know the starting price,' as you put it?"

Vera stared at her. "He'll have a pretty good idea. Face it, Es, Tony's never been faithful to me; he was even cheating on me while him and me were cheating on his first wife, get the idea? Sauce for the goose, and so on. . . . Don't be so shocked. I don't flaunt the relationship and nothing's ever happened under Tony's roof, I'm strict about that."

Abstractedly, Miss Butters

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

was taken aback for the umpteenth time, over the strangers we call friends, and their secret qualms and sticking-points. She supposed, dazedly, that by Vera's own standards, Vera was a reasonably moral person.

"Gerry comes round the house, but a lot of other fellers do, too, a lot of people in general, you for instance. Tony can't grumble at that. And if he does—" She swallowed the rest of the angry statement.

Sensing its thrust, Esme Butters groaned, "You'd run off with *Gerry Meadows?* Madness, Vee, in matters of the heart he has the attention span of a chimpanzee. He always drops his conquests, and God knows if Tony would take you back."

Having fended for herself since teenage days, Miss Butters' concern for her friend, morality aside, came down to money. "You're accustomed to the good life, nice clothes, charge accounts. Don't throw all that away."

It was Vera's turn to be nonplussed. "Bless your heart, Es, Tony needs me a sight more than I need him. I'll always be an earner, I can survive on my own. Who d'you think writes ninety percent of Tony's famous books? I mean he's always gone on about me suggesting sexy bits, that's good publicity, but you never catch him owning up that I work out the stories and pick real people for characters, and scramble two or three together so we can't be sued. Tone does the polishing . . . *he* reckons."

Aghast at herself, Vera said, "Hell, don't breathe a word of that, Es. Tone would kill me, and the publishers would have a fit!"

For days, weeks, Esme Butters fretted. Mischief, she kept thinking, it can end only in mischief. Vera Callaghan, whatever she claimed, was besotted with Gerry Meadows and in that grand romantic tradition was capable of any idiocy. Tony Callaghan was more of an unknown quantity to Miss Butters, apart from being a drunken boor. And Gerry Meadows, a handsome fellow and excellent jobbing builder, had about as much sense of responsibility and ethics as the Emperor Nero. . . .

Until she took to wondering whether she was absurdly out of date. Gerry Meadows dined regularly at the manor. Once or twice he and Tony Callaghan were seen playing darts together at the village pub, The Roman Wall. More frequently, Gerry Meadows and Vera Callaghan were seen together, usually entering or leaving a holiday studio flat she had rented, not quite far enough away on the coast at Longsands

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Bay. But there was no explosion.

Steeple Oaks gossip subsided into the rural shorthand of meaning nods, jerks of the chin, narrow smiles at the mention of any of the trio's names. Though it was said that Gerry Meadows had never stuck to one mistress for so long. A regular married-unmarried couple, him and the London tart. More smiles.

Vera pleaded, "Please come, Es." Her smile was a pathetic cry. "You'll get the best view of the fireworks display and you know the grub's good, especially seeing as it's free. Ooh, now you're frowning, I shouldn't have done that bit, I've got no class."

Miss Butters smiled grudgingly. "Don't start that orphan-of-the-storm business, Vee, I know it of old. What on earth's wrong?"

"This damned dinner party tomorrow night. Gerry's a big kid, he's coming because he wants to watch the fireworks, if you please! And the vicar and his wife will be there, same reason. *And* that silly old woman Percy Thornett, Tone's publisher, he arrived just now and he's staying until Monday, *quelle* drag. Plus, Tone's in a funny mood lately, he's all right when it's just the two of us, but in company, he either slags me off or gets on Gerry's case when Gerry's there—and my Gerry's a big lad, he's ready to whack Tony—and if that happens with the vicar and Mrs. Vic and the biggest mouth in British publishing to take it all in . . ." She ran out of breath, though only momentarily. "You're a lady, Es, pardon the expression. Tony minds his P's and Q's when you're on deck. *Please . . .*"

So Esme Butters dined with the Callaghans on the night of the killing. As Vera had promised, the food was excellent, Paul and Andre (alias Albert from Brixton), the willowy, apparently mute young houseman and the cook, always ensured as much.

The manor was an ugly house from the outside and little better indoors. The dining room contrived to be cavernous and drafty while cramped and subtly confining.

Tony Callaghan picked at his food and punished the wine. His wife was a fitfully attentive hostess who laughed too often. Thornett, the publisher, talked glibly, entertainingly and—Esme Butters admitted, reluctantly magnetized by him—entertainingly.

Gerry Meadows, wisely, spoke as little as possible. He looked splendid. With a pang, Miss Butters told herself: *He never chose that suit and tie, far less*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

paid for them. Nightmarishly, Tony Callaghan seemed to pick up the theme by ESP, remarking out of the blue, *"I* used to get ties given me. Eh, Vera?"

It caused a stammer in the general conversation, followed by headlong haste to fill the gap. Callaghan smiled nastily and confidingly at the brandy decanter, as if it bore the face of a crony.

Providentially the vicar and his wife had arranged to join the party for coffee, on the plea of having to supervise their children's packing for return to boarding school. It was their standard polite excuse for non-attendance, regardless of the school calendar. Grimly Esme Butters concluded that Mr. and Mrs. Upyard, last to hear Steeple Oaks gossip, had caught up at last and were ducking an ordeal without shirking it outright.

The Upyards arrived and were made much of, Mrs. Upyard's five-seasons-veteran dress complimented, the vicar bullied into taking a small brandy in the cause of "wine for his stomach's sake."

An hour, Miss Butters thought, *an hour and I can go home.*

Working his neck uncomfortably—he wasn't a collar and tie man—Gerry Meadows prompted, "Time for the fireworks, ladies and gents!" Which was truer than he knew, and an epitaph of sorts. . . .

Fat Percy Thornett fluted, "Really, I can see quite well from here. Those french windows overlook the scene, do they not? I'm too venerable to blunder about in damp grass on a dark night." Miss Butters started, for under the table, Mr. Thornett was palpating her leg, slightly above the knee, in silent suggestion to linger with him.

Wolf in old woman's clothing, she joked inwardly; she must share the insight with Vera, some other day. "Much better view out there," she said firmly, fleeing.

Tony Callaghan announced, "Want my camera, could get some good stuff with a long exposure. Your specialty, Vera, long exposures." Mr. and Mrs. Upyard pretended not to hear as Callaghan swayed out into the hall while the rest of the group trooped through the french windows to the flagstoned walk.

Sight adjusting to darkness, Esme Butters heard the vicar's wife hiss in irritation and dismay, her husband's "Oh dear," adding genuine regret to the chorus. Vera Callaghan and Gerry Meadows were sauntering down the sloping lawn, brazenly hand in hand. *That's torn it,* she thought. *Silly fools, and such bad form.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"The island's a good vantage point," Miss Butters stated, lamely. Nobody commented. Thirty yards ahead, some Victorian owner of the manor had decreed a toy lake, hardly ankle deep, unconvincingly circular, a giant hoop of polished steel in the night.

Hub of the fifty foot wheel, the island was an arbitrary stub of carved rock rising perhaps four feet above the still water, reached by a decaying rustic bridge. Obviously no one wanted to join Vera and Meadows out there, even had there been room—their figures, vaguely visible now that Steeple Oaks had lit its village green bonfire, spreading an orange glow, held the uncomfortable suggestion of bride and groom atop a wedding cake.

"Perhaps our next bonfire will honor a king," the vicar suggested, avid to change the subject. The fireworks display marked a royal anniversary. Mrs. Upyard loyally struck up a discussion on similar events, past, present, and projected.

Gerry Meadows' whoop floated back to them from the island. His keener eyes had spotted a distant sputter of sparks. "There she goes!"

It was a tremendous display and gratefully, Esme Butters emptied her mind and encountered childhood again.

Golden fountains flowed high in the darkness, silver trees grew and vanished into autumn, in a heartbeat. Rockets made sabre-hacks at thin air before fraying into tassels and jewels. Sometimes the night wept molten tears, sometimes lacy rosettes of vivid red scorched the sky in glory, like the expanding blossoms of fire racing across charred paper under a breath of wind. And all the while there were the sounds from up there: cannonades, wails, goblin laughter, elfin shrieks of joy and cold mockery. It was the finest show of pyrotechnics in Steeple Oaks memory.

Or in a certain instance, dying memory.

Esme Butters was reflecting that the noises were extraordinary, nearly human, when with a tightening of throat and scalp she understood that the scream *was* human. It came from Vera Callaghan, little more than forty yards away, and she sounded primitive, inhuman, out of her mind.

And out on the island, there was no sign of Gerry Meadows.

Inanely, Miss Butters whimpered mentally, *Something awful's happening, happened . . . why won't they stop the fireworks?*

Stupid, since the display was in the village, the better part of a mile off beyond the manor's boundary. A cluster of rockets

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

exploded, shedding light long enough to show Tony Callaghan, the sheen of his fair hair unmistakable, racing towards the lake from the house.

His feet turned the bridge into a drum. He was yelling something now, a crouched and apelike bulk beside the screaming pillar of Vera Callaghan. Shouting over and over again. The vicar made sense of it first. "Get help," he repeated hoarsely. "Quick, the telephone, a doctor, ambulance . . . "

Mrs. Upyard darted away, jamming in the french windows with the houseman, Paul, who had stationed himself behind the guests.

Another firework, achingly brilliant, a searing yet chilly inverted burning bush. Esme Butters, heart pounding, still appreciated the image it created—the rippled lake's circular furrows tipped with borrowed brilliance. Not a hoop but an ebony shield with ephemeral silver chasing. She brushed the picture aside even as it disappeared forever, and started running clumsily towards the lake.

"Stay back," Callaghan shouted when she reached the bridge, "nothing must be touched." Vera had collapsed, he was holding her, and the words made no sense until he added, "Gerry's dead—not just dead, killed."

"It's a bit of a mess," Inspector Jacques declared with memorable understatement. He was sitting alone with Miss Butters in the manor's dining room, a stocky, grizzled fellow whose jutting nose and chin gave him strong family resemblance to Mr. Punch in the puppet show.

As he spoke, artificial dawn broke outside, temporary floodlights illuminating lawn, lake, and island and making her start and cry out. "Now the dog can see the rabbit," Jacques crowed to himself. "We won't search for the weapon and other things until tomorrow, but at least nobody else can go sneaking about and tidying up, meanwhile. Mrs. Callaghan's in bed, sedated, with a woman officer on the door; Mr. Callaghan has Sergeant Devere for company."

His meaning was obvious, making her protest, "Neither of them could have done it. Mr. Callaghan was with us, nowhere near the island until he went to help Vera. And she'd never kill Gerry Meadows, they were—" Miss Butters swallowed the argument but Inspector Jacques completed it for her.

"They were lovers, had been for months."

She avoided comment on that. "Anyway, Vera was wearing a skin-tight dress with a gauzy

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

stole when she went into the garden, she wasn't carrying . . . anything."

The policeman was patronizing. "That proves nothing, she could have left the weapon ready on the island or taken it off Meadows before killing him. But I take your point. A better one is that pretty as she is, her arms are like limp spaghetti. She didn't kill Meadows for the simple reason of lacking the strength.

"Our doctor's mustard, the post-mortem will disclose more but for the present he says Gerry Meadows was stabbed with something like a stiletto or even a sword. Stabbed just the once, with great force, the killer really meant it, punched the thing home—sorry, Miss B."

"Horrible! Look, inspector, I spoke to one of your young men an hour ago, told him all I saw, which wasn't much. May I go home now?"

Ignoring the plea, he said, "You don't remember me. My wife went to your creative writing courses at Bamford Tech last year. Sometimes I'd be early, fetching her home, and catch the final few minutes of your talks. It struck me at the time, you've got a very flowery way of putting things, but deep down you're a noticing kind of lady." And he beamed at her, evidently imagining that he'd paid a compliment.

Flowery, indeed!

Inspector Jacques became meditative. "Husband, wife, fancy-man . . . we call it a Fish-and-Chipper in the force, Miss B., when one of the three gets murdered. Because it's always easily wrapped up, only three corners to a triangle, one's crossed out, leaves the remaining two. Except it doesn't seem to work out here." He chuckled abruptly. "Of course, Mrs. Callaghan has the answer. Had to be a ghost that impaled Meadows, an evil spirit, stands to reason. In a loony way, I get her drift. That so-called island is pretty snug with a pair of people on it. No third party could hide there, far less fight—and she swears only she and the dead man were present."

Shivering, Esme Butters hugged herself.

"But we don't believe in ghosts, now do we," Jacques teased her. He pulled a blue, printed sheet of paper from the folder beside him. "This is the statement you made just now. Sergeant Devere interviewed you, I'm sure he listened, but he slimmed it down and paraphased. Um . . . 'At approximately eight twenty P.M. the majority of the guests moved to the grounds.' Doesn't sound like the Miss Butters I remember from those evening classes.

"So take me through it again, talk me through it, as the sports

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

commentators on telly are always saying. Every little detail and frilly bit, same as you'll be telling it at coffee mornings."

Stung, Esme Butters snapped, "How dare you!"

Inspector Jacques winced drolly, shook his head, chuckled, "Pardon me. But every detail. Nice and slow, because I'm writing it down as we go. The looks, the smells, the sounds."

Stiff and wary at first, Miss Butters gradually warmed to her task. The fireworks alone covered a page and half of notebook. At the end, Inspector Jacques sat flexing his fingers.

"Funny," he mumbled at last, "all of you saw what happened, after a fashion—the male servants, the vicar and his wife, Mr. Callaghan, yourself. In a negative way that publisher chappie, Mr. Thornett, is the most helpful. He stayed indoors, dozed off, doesn't even try to give a version of events.

"Leaving us with the usual situation after half a dozen people witness a road accident. You'd hardly credit that they're describing the identical incident. More like people trying to find out about an elephant while using every sense except sight—you end up with a most peculiar animal. Which is what this case is."

Nettled again, Esme Butters said coldly, "I did my best."

"And a very good best it was. You looked and didn't see, same as the others . . . except part of you *did* see," Inspector Jacques retorted. "I love the bit about the lake being a shield embossed with silver. From, as you explained, the silvery light of the fireworks on the ripples." He paused expectantly. Miss Butters, unable to oblige, felt thoroughly stupid.

"Ripples," he repeated flatly. "Ripples spreading on the lake, Miss B. Nobody else noticed that. The lake is artificial, no currents. There wasn't a breath of wind, which accounts for the fireworks display's being extra spectacular, by the way. There shouldn't have been ripples. Mr. Callaghan reached the island by the bridge, never touched the water. So why ripples?"

Weary, overwrought, baffled, Esme Butters felt that if Inspector Jacques said the word once more, she'd scream. She was wrong.

"Ripples," Jacques mouthed, savoring the sound. "Because somebody on that island had the bad luck to chuck something into the lake, just as your famous burning bush affair went off and made the ripples catch your eye."

"It was a loony scheme," Inspector Jacques told Miss Butters on the afternoon of the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

following day. "Mr. Tony Callaghan's your clever chump, he realized he was automatic prime suspect so he tried to rig the business to prove that it was nothing to do with him.

"Mrs. Callaghan wrote his books—Thornett the publisher as good as admitted it when I talked to him last night, though that was a trade secret. Then she fell for Gerry Meadows and unlike previous affairs, it threatened to become long-term, there was a strong likelihood of her doing a runner with her toy-boy and then where would Tony Callaghan be?"

Rested and unwillingly fascinated, Esme Butters objected, "But he couldn't have stabbed Gerry Meadows without Vera's seeing him—all of us seeing him. Not without turning invisible. Tony Callaghan was off to one side, taking photographs. When Vera started that dreadful screaming, he went pelting down to the island, on a long diagonal across the lawn from the left. I remember how he fell and rolled and got up immediately, I thought that he'd have twisted his ankle if he had been sober; drunken men can emerge unscathed . . . ."

Something in Jacques' eyes caused her to trail away.

"There you go," he chided, "taking a grain of observation and building a palace of speculation on it.

"Mr. Callaghan wasn't drunk. He wasn't taking photographs in the dark. He placed himself off to one side at the back of the house, with a camera on its tripod, but that's not the same thing; he had other things to attend to. And he fell and rolled because he needed to explain why his clothes were soaked with dew, in case anybody noticed and asked.

"No, Tony Callaghan didn't stab Gerry Meadows. Any fool could tell that. The victim and Mrs. Callaghan were out on the island, she didn't do it, and while she was half off her head with shock, I knew the killer couldn't have done it right under her nose." Jacques sighed impatiently. "Leaving us with a theory of somebody at the edge of the lake with a ruddy long sword, say twenty yards long, or a weapon that'd make the old knights' lances look like a sawn-off cocktail stick. Which was daft.

"Therefore Meadows wasn't stabbed, he was shot."

Miss Butters opened her mouth and the policeman cut in, "Not a gun, Miss B. Shot with an arrow. Or a bolt, if you want to be exact, seeing that the weapon was a crossbow.

"Bound to be, when you think about it. Callaghan had to fire it from cover, flat on his belly, and the longbow, your Robin Hood job, is no good for that.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Here's how it worked—Vera Callaghan and Gerry Meadows go to the island. If they hadn't, Callaghan would have maneuvered them down somehow, but he didn't need to, they wanted to distance themselves from you lot and have a cuddle while the fireworks went off."

"You have," Miss Butters said sarcastically, "a lyrically romantic touch, Mr. Jacques."

The policeman sniggered, "I leave that to you, luv. Anyway, Callaghan went off to fetch his camera—and the crossbow, quite compact, pistol style. He'd bought it at a London sports store, we'll trace the purchase if we have to, and trained himself on the sly.

"You're all staring up at the night sky, oohing and ahing. Callaghan drops on his belly, wriggles down to the rim of the lake, puts a crossbow bolt into Gerry Meadows. Then he wriggles away, far enough to make the 'rescue run' look convincing. The bow breaks into two main parts, crosspiece and handle, which he shoves deep into molehills.

"There's time for that because Vera Callaghan doesn't start screaming at the moment Gerry Meadows is struck. He staggers against her, sort of grunts, 'sits down' in her words, almost knocking her off her feet. It's dark, remember, with flashes of light from the display. She tries to lift him, asks what's wrong, feels and then sees his blood on her hands. *Then* she throws a wobbly and takes to screaming. Hubby dashes to the scene, she's fainted, collapsed anyway, by then. Callaghan wrenches the crossbow bolt out, throws it into the lake: presto, the ghost with the stiletto, that evil spirit with a rapier, is the culprit." Inspector Jacques slapped his palms together.

Esme Butters said, "You were certain of all that *before* I told you of the ripples."

"Certainly. I told you it was a Fish-and-Chipper, had to be Callaghan, the question was *how*. That, and convincing him that I knew, other people knew—your good self for one, Miss B.—and he might as well give up.

" 'She saw you ditch the bolt,' I said. 'And you can't be daft enough to assume we won't be draining the lake.'

"Well, Callaghan isn't daft. Insane, it may turn out, and his brain's half pickled whatever the trick-cyclists decree, but daft he is not. So I told him, 'You think the lake hasn't been cleaned for a generation or so, there's feet of mud besides, and what we find among the debris may not look anything like an arrow. Am I right?' "

Jacques guffawed heartlessly. "From the look on Tony

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Callaghan's face, I was right. I expected the bolt to be paper—paper or thin cardboard, rolled, is stronger than you'd expect. Make an arrow that way, with water-soluble glue, and it should disintegrate in hours, in the lake. Leaving only the barb, too small to register on metal detectors unless they're right on top of it.

"What we did find this morning, when the water was pumped out, was a thin plastic tube like a big drinking straw, bit thicker than a pencil. And nearby, a plastic flight, sort they make for darts but rather larger, a crude, homemade affair worked up out of plastic card.

"Loony but clever, in tune with the entire affair. Callaghan plugged one end of the tube with the arrowhead, filled it with water, plugged the other end with the flight, stuck it in a freezer and the three sections of bolt were firmly bonded, ready for action. Pitched into the lake, after he'd yanked it out, the ice would melt. Leaving odd scraps of plastic rubbish. If we'd been looking for a weapon, as in dagger, their significance might have been missed.

"My chaps are still sifting mud by the bucket, smashing job, to locate the barb. Dotting i's and crossing t's because Mr. Callaghan has made a full admission."

Inspector Jacques nearly winked at Miss Butters. "Your ripples started the rot, made Tony Callaghan see sense, or as close to sense as he can manage these days. I told him that come daylight, we'd find the crossbow as well, maybe with his prints still on it. He'd had time to make that double journey to the lake, covert followed by open, but not unlimited time. The weapon couldn't be far."

Esme Butters shivered again. All that planning, the futile ingenuity: *worse* than ghosts and evil spirits. Gerry Meadows dead, Tony Callaghan ruined and destroyed, Vera Callaghan . . . She frowned, uncertain what to predict for Vera. Perhaps, as the horror and hysteria dimmed, more books, more money, more lovers.

"Flowery," she ejaculated. "But I did see the ripples."

"Oh yes," Inspector Jacques agreed. "It's a terrible cliché, Miss B., but with your way of looking at things, we're talking poetic justice."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Surprise

by Gary Alexander

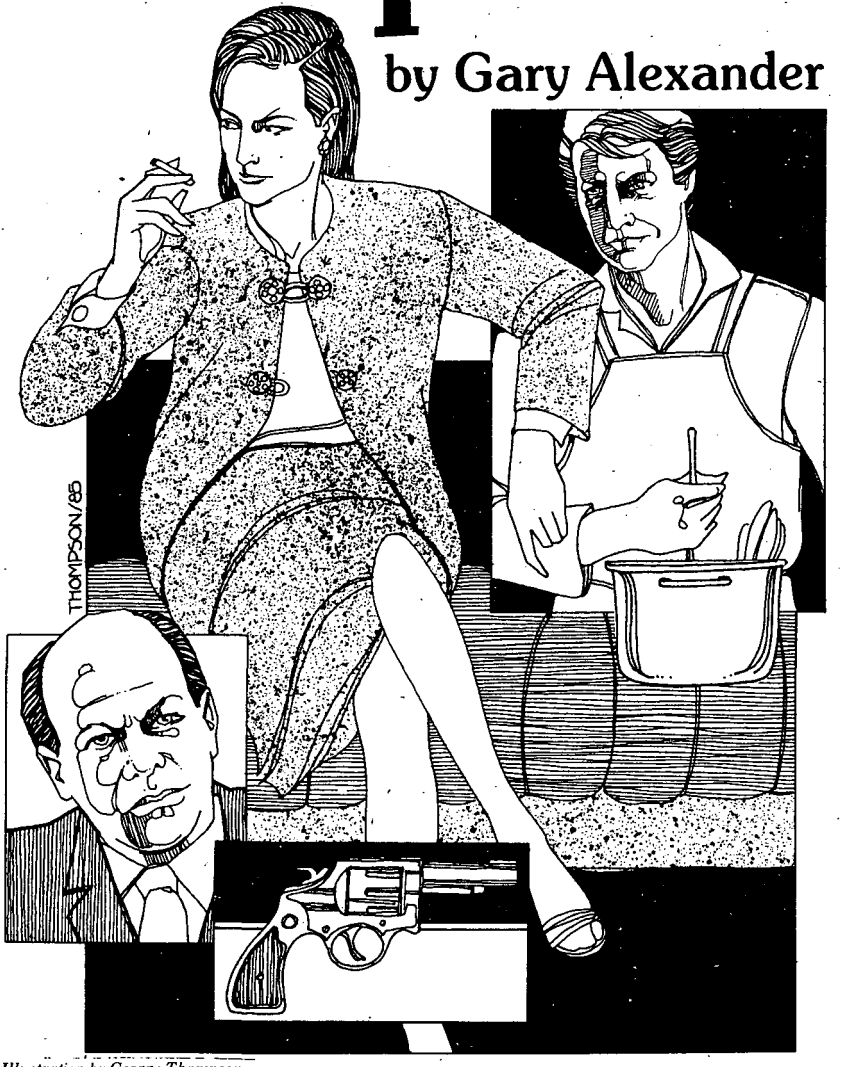


Illustration by George Thompson

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Randy barely hears the doorbell over the droning of the Hoover. Slapping at the switch, he shuts it off. He is in a foul mood. He has been vacuuming under Mona's recliner, finding all manner of debris that has dropped through to the carpet—popcorn, bobby pins, and coins that he must scoop up by hand. How many times has her told her that a single dime sucked up in the machine may cause an expensive repair they cannot afford?

Randy is still self-conscious in his role as househusband, so he also flicks off the TV. That soap opera doesn't interest him much anyway. The better ones are on later.

He opens the door and sees Meredith standing there, briefcase in hand.

"Oh my God!" she says.

He is too stunned to speak.

"I had no idea. This is as much a surprise to me as to you. I was canvassing the neighborhood and—" She pauses for a nervous giggle. "I guess what they say about a small world is true."

Randy manages a weak nod. Two weeks ago, Meredith had been his first indiscretion in fourteen years of marriage. Discouraged after a bleak morning of job hunting, he had stopped at the shopping mall and treated himself to a late lunch at the Lamplighter Inn. Then he retired to the lounge, planning to smooth the hard edges of rejection with bourbon.

It was a slack period. Except for an attractive woman two stools to the right, he had the bar to himself. Randy began to chat with the woman, whose name was Meredith Harper. In the space of three drinks, chitchat shifted to *talk*, talk serious enough for them to take a table. It seemed that they both had frustrations, grievances. So much in common. He cannot recall which of them casually mentioned the fact that the Lamplighter Inn was also a motel.

"I'm sorry," Meredith says, turning to leave. "I really didn't—"

"Wait," Randy says, remembering that she sells. But what? Vitamins or diet pills or the like? He had arrived home at six thirty, his hangover already in full bloom. Incredibly, Mona had taken one squint at him and sent him to bed, saying that everyone deserved a toot now and then. "Maybe we can use what you have."

She eyes him warily.

"No, not that," he says, really meaning it. As great as she looks, ten years younger than he to boot, no way will he allow things to get out of hand again.

He escorts her inside. She sits

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

primly on the sofa and opens her briefcase. It is stuffed with samples—vitamins, minerals, and dietary aids.

She seems to brighten in a detached sort of way, shifting gears from nervous caution to a canned spiel. She speaks of an exciting new product line designed for the busy adult of the eighties, of vital supplements not always found in quick meals. And if you're overweight or suffering the blahs, well, we have the answer to that, too. Et cetera, et cetera.

She finishes and Randy thinks, okay, no problem, we can spring for a jug of the powdered sprouts. He tells Meredith that, reaches for his wallet, asking for the rose hip Vitamin C, too. The budget-sized container, please.

"I appreciate it, Randy, but I'm more interested in getting established in this area. Territory-wise, you know."

"Uh-huh." Bad vibes used to be the term for what he has.

She averts her eyes. "It's so difficult. I had no idea that the competition from health food stores and direct retailers would be so fierce."

There's that vulnerability again. She had cried afterward, saying that despite the physical attraction they could never repeat the sin.

"I imagine it is."

"My husband can't wait for me to fail," she says sadly.

The creep, Randy thinks; a periodontist interested only in mining money from diseased gums and staying late at his clinic with his little cookie of a receptionist. "Keep at it. I liked your pitch. You'll do fine. To hell with him."

"Thank you. Encouragement keeps me going. I can't count how many doors have slammed in my face today."

Randy points at the samples. "Let's throw in the calcium pills. Everybody needs more calcium."

"Actually, what I really need is a party. When I'm demonstrating in someone's home in front of the person's guests, it's really an icebreaker."

Uh-oh. "You mean like one of those cosmetics things?"

"Well, yes. Do you think it would be possible, Randy? I mean, nobody would ever suspect, you know. It would be strictly business, and you and your family would receive over fifty dollars' worth of free merchandise. I don't know anyone else in the neighborhood. Could you, Randy? Please."

Randy is frightened to say no to this woman who so passionately said yes. Of course he can. Meredith asks if a week from Tuesday is convenient. Absolutely, he says, walking her to the door with a queasy feeling in his stomach.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Randy is preparing one of his hamburger creations when Mona arrives home from work. He has always enjoyed puttering in the kitchen and has learned that he is a fairly decent cook. He can do good work on a tight budget, and tonight's meatballs in mushroom sauce with braised vegetables are no exception.

Their girls are at school activities and will eat with friends, so it's just he and Mona and his revelation.

He puts dinner on the table as he listens to her day, the gauntlet she has run as a department store purchasing manager. It is another verse of the same song: indifferent employees, bureaucratic inertia, and plain old stupidity. He listens patiently. After all, when he was the primary breadwinner, he unburdened on *her*.

He studies her as she speaks. He notices similarities to Meredith. The same hand gestures, the same dark eyes. Most of all, they share a quiet resolve. One should not be deceived by their femininity: these are two strong women. The differences are graying hair and a decade of weight packed on. This last observation shivers him with guilt.

She tastes dinner and compliments him. He says thank you and slips in edgewise with the news that he has been visited by a representative of a firm that markets food supplements. He tells her how impressed he was with the line, how he has agreed to host a party.

"I wouldn't miss it," Mona says. "I'd like to see what he has to offer."

"She."

Mona laughs. "I'll bet she's cute. You're blushing."

His face is on fire, he feels it. He'd never make it as a steady philanderer. He flutters a hand. "Not bad. Okay."

She laughs again. "A cute door-to-door salesperson got to you. Do you remember six or seven years ago, before I started working, that cute door-to-door peddler who sold me all those brushes and knickknacks? Do you remember how furious you were?"

He does indeed and smiles sheepishly.

"Sounds like fun. I'll even make the snacks."

A week from Tuesday, seven P.M.: Randy and Mona's living room is full. Friends, neighbors, and co-workers from Mona's store sit on folding chairs and on the floor. Randy has no colleagues to offer. The software company that employed him as an engineer went under six months ago. They specialized in arcade video games, a market

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

with the smell of death to it. His professional option was a speculative move to Silicon Valley, where he could shell out a quarter of a million for a similar three bedroom suburban ranch house. No way. Not with Mona doing so well. Plus the trauma of yanking the girls out of school.

Thus the househusband experiment, holding options open if something in his field opens up. It hasn't yet, and Mona's paychecks are paying the bills.

Meredith had come earlier to set up. She was businesslike, playing to Mona, ignoring Randy. A pretty good little actress. Now she's in her presentation, lively and witty, yet getting her message across.

Mona's cheese and cracker crunchies are a big hit. So is Randy's punch. As they keep plates and cups filled, and ashtrays emptied, Randy notices the pot-bellied guy sitting Indian-style by the coat closet. Bud something. Didn't they play softball against each other a few years ago? He lives four or five blocks away, but he isn't in their neighborhood group. He's by himself, blank-faced, not having much fun.

Meredith is winding up her pitch with an emphasis on franchise opportunities. This area is wide open, she says. There are fortunes to be made, she adds, explaining that she is more a distributor than a dealer, with authority from national headquarters to award territories to qualified, motivated individuals.

She talks of exclusive rights, unique and exciting lines, and an investment that could be repaid within weeks. The fee is a mere eleven thousand, with six thousand additional for start-up inventory. Maybe it's all in his head, but Randy feels that the franchise information is directed at him and Bud something. Meredith seems to be swiveling her head between them a lot.

Then she takes orders—a couple of hundred bucks' worth, Randy guesses. She stays after everyone leaves, helping with the cleanup. Meredith and Mona are becoming buddy-buddy, one career woman to another. He detects no innuendoes or sexual telepathy, thank God.

Later, when they are alone, Mona says, "A franchise might be profitable. People are very conscious of health and nutrition these days."

It is another subtle hint, protective of his ego, a hint that says we cannot be a one-paycheck family forever, not with two bright girls who will be in college before we know it.

"I don't know if I'm the salesman type," Randy says. "I'll

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

keep looking in my field for a while longer."

"Meredith, I think, would be fine to work with. She's very capable and she knows how to get things done. That's my impression of her."

Randy shrugs.

"I'm not pressuring you, dear," Mona says. "In fact, I love our arrangement. I'll take a stupid boss over waxy yellow buildup any time."

"And seventeen thousand bucks is seventeen thou we don't have."

"Meredith mentioned financing. All I'm saying is to keep your mind open."

Next morning, as Randy loads the dishwasher, deciding how to attack his next big chore—cleaning out the garage—the phone rings.

"Randy, this is Bud Twellis. From last night. Weren't we in the same softball league once upon a time?"

Randy has a sudden flashback. Bud played third base for Riley's Tavern. He was a holler guy, pounding his mitt, mouth going a mile a minute, coaxing his teammates, ragging the umps.

"Yeah. Nice to see you again, Bud," he says blandly.

"Hey, look, are you free around noontime?"

Of course he is, but he isn't sure he wants to be. "Well, I have some errands—"

"Won't take long. I'll buy you a cold one. The Lamplighter? You name the time, Randy. I sell on the road. I'm flexible."

Randy is not keen on the idea, especially with the Lamplighter as the venue, but agrees. They meet in the lounge, shake hands, and small talk for a while over draft beer. Randy feels a thick tension and knows it's not all him.

"Meredith is quite a gal," Bud says. "What do you think about buying a dealership from her? Seventeen grand is heavy bucks."

"I'm sure there's potential," he says, leaving it at that.

After a long pause, Bud says, "She called me, strongly suggesting I attend your party last night."

"Glad you could make it."

"Look, Randy, I'm no angel. I mess around a little. Know what I mean?"

Randy stares at the backbar mirror and nods. Talk about innuendoes and sexual telepathy. "Did you meet her here?"

"Three weeks ago. God, what a woman! Never thought I'd see her again."

"Did she cry?"

Bud clenches a fist. "That dentist husband of hers, I was ready to punch his face out!"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Randy buys the next round. The garage will have to wait. "I don't suppose all this is a coincidence."

Bud shakes his head. "Only if you believe in the Tooth Fairy."

"What's next for us? Blackmail?"

"She's playing it close to the vest so far, but yeah, I wouldn't be surprised."

"What are our options?"

Bud ticks them off on his fingers. "One, we can cave in, even though it's impossible for me. Christ, I'm mortgaged to the hilt, with an ex-wife to support besides. Secondly, we can say no and see what happens."

"I don't think she bluffs," Randy offers.

Bud looks at him and smirks. "Or numero three-o, we can take her for a twenty foot walk off a ten foot pier."

Randy is angry. His mind locks on the years of junk piled in the garage. Buried somewhere in the debris is a .22 pistol, a childhood gift from his father. They used to go to the dump and plink at tin cans, but he hasn't touched the gun in ages. No, no, no, he tells himself; I'm not *that* angry. "Are you serious?"

"Nah, not really, but it is a pleasant thought. There might be another angle. I sell office supplies. We check new clients through credit bureaus. I'll run Dr. and Mrs. Harper and see what the computer burps up. Credit reports usually tell more than the subject cares for you to know. If Meredith threatens blackmail, maybe we can counterpunch and threaten to go to her old man."

"Sneaky," Randy says.

Bud raises his glass and clinks Randy's. "Thank you."

Three mornings later, Bud Twellis calls. "Randy, the broad's a pathological liar. She's single, never been married. She lives in a condo north of us, on the hill overlooking downtown. Dynamite view, huge payments."

"No periodontist?"

"She doesn't even have a cat. What she does have is credit problems. Fancy car. And you've seen how she dresses. She's in over her head, behind on everything. She's had nine jobs in the last four years, all door-to-door sales. She makes good money, but not enough for her lifestyle. She's desperate and this routine of hers smacks of a pyramid scheme."

"Where does that leave us?"

"I don't know. She's been phoning my office. I've told my gal to tell her that I'm out of town, which I really will be as of the end of this conversation. I'm playing ostrich for the time

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

being. The ball is in that bitch's court."

Randy and Bud wish each other luck. Randy hangs up, starts for the garage and the project he has just begun. The doorbell rings. Meredith is there with a warm smile and two boxes.

"Luckily, we had everything ordered at the party in stock."

"Lucky," he mutters, carrying a box in.

Randy offers coffee. When he returns from the kitchen with cups, she asks, "Did you and Mona have a chance to talk it over?"

To keep his hands off her neck, Randy stuffs them into the pockets of his jeans, and says, "We did. We don't feel that we can swing it financially."

"Oh, you can. Nobody has that kind of cash. We'll work with you on financing."

"Did you suggest that to Bud Twellis, too, *Miss* Harper?"

"I don't understand."

"Come on, Meredith."

A tear forms at the corner of one of her eyes, as if from a dropper. "You're trying to cheapen what we shared."

"Jesus. I don't believe this."

"You have equity in your lovely home, Randy. You can swing it with a second mortgage."

There are no more tears, just that one. She is staring at him with eyes hard and dry. He feels goosebumps.

"No, Meredith. Sorry, not interested."

She goes to the door and opens it. "Mona brings home the bacon, doesn't she? Perhaps I should see her."

Thoroughly emasculated and with his bluff called, he can do nothing but stare at the door she has slammed.

Randy kills the remainder of the morning and the early afternoon with chores. He scrubs the bathtub, chases dust kittens under the beds, and washes the kitchen windows. Out comes the crock pot. He begins dinner, chopping round steak and vegetables for a slow-cooked stew. Mona has always told him that domestic drudgery is good therapy. Especially cooking. He believes.

But when the stew is simmering, there remains only the garage. That mess requires organization, thinking. It is not mindless enough. His thoughts return to Meredith.

To hell with it. He drives to her condo, hoping maybe he can cut a deal. Risking his house is out of the question, but how much can her commission be? He'll offer her a portion of it, in monthly payments.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Bud wasn't kidding. The place is nice. Randy sees Meredith's car in her numbered slot and goes to her door. He knocks, waits, knocks again. He knows she's home and can just imagine why she isn't answering. Catching her *in flagrante delicto* wouldn't hurt his cause a bit. So long as the guy isn't too big and hostile.

He tries the door. It's unlocked. To hell with it again. He walks in and almost trips over Meredith, who is obviously dead. There are two small holes in her blouse, holes surrounded by dried blood. Beside her is a sofa pillow. The pillow also has holes. And powder burns. An improvised silencer, he knows.

He takes deep breaths for a moment, fighting nausea. He has never seen a dead person before, except at funerals. He backs out and locks the door. Nobody is around. This is yuppie country; the neighbors are out climbing some corporate ladder or another.

He heads home, thinking of Bud Twellis and his Twenty Foot Pier Solution. Which may be more than a bad joke. He has to know for sure. He stops at a phone booth and calls Bud's office.

The secretary informs him that Mr. Twellis is out of town on business. Randy insists on speaking to him immediately. The secretary says that it is impossible. Randy says that he has a huge order but needs delivery dates.

This is a bluff he wins. She gives him the number of a stationery store in Salem and says that Mr. Twellis has an appointment there now.

Randy thanks her and digs for change. Salem is a five hour drive. To zap Meredith, he would have had to make his getaway by helicopter.

He plunks coins in the phone. A clerk answers. He asks for Bud. "Twellis here."

Randy replaces the receiver. If not Bud, who? He finishes the afternoon at the Lamplighter, drinking fast, blurring reality.

He gets home five minutes before Mona.

"What smells so heavenly?" she asks.

He doesn't reply. He has turned on the local news and Meredith's condo is the scene of the lead story. A reporter with a grim face and sculpted hair is describing the murder. Execution style, he calls it.

Mona slumps into her chair. "God, I can't believe it. We had lunch today. She invited me. She said she talked to you about the franchise. You told her that you had decided to buy, but that she should discuss it with me, too. I tried calling you. The phone rang and rang."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Randy notices that her grief is distant, as if she is viewing a story on a Pakistan cyclone. This is a woman who sobs when a cat is run over on the street.

"I was out on errands. Excuse me."

Randy goes into the garage. He hasn't made much headway, but he remembers where the pistol is. It's with high school annuals and other memorabilia his folks brought over when they sold their house and moved to Arizona for retirement.

The carton the gun came in is empty. Randy trudges back into the house.

Mona is in the kitchen, sampling his stew.

"Mm! It tastes as heavenly as it smells. When the girls get home from soccer practice, they'll love it, too."

"Thanks."

"Poor Meredith. She was so nice. Superficial, but nice."

"What do you mean by superficial?"

"I had the store's credit department check her. I don't want to speak ill of the dead, but she wasn't what she said she was. Poor thing. That dentist husband of hers was a fantasy."

"Oh?" Randy says.

"I had to say that I'd recommend against the investment. Of course the final decision was yours."

What *was* said? Randy wonders. A threat to steal her husband? Or did innuendoes and sexual telepathy do the trick? Meredith was capable of anything.

"I got a raise today," Mona says. "So there's no hurry for you. I mean, you can take as long as you want. I just want it to be right for you."

"Congratulations," Randy says.

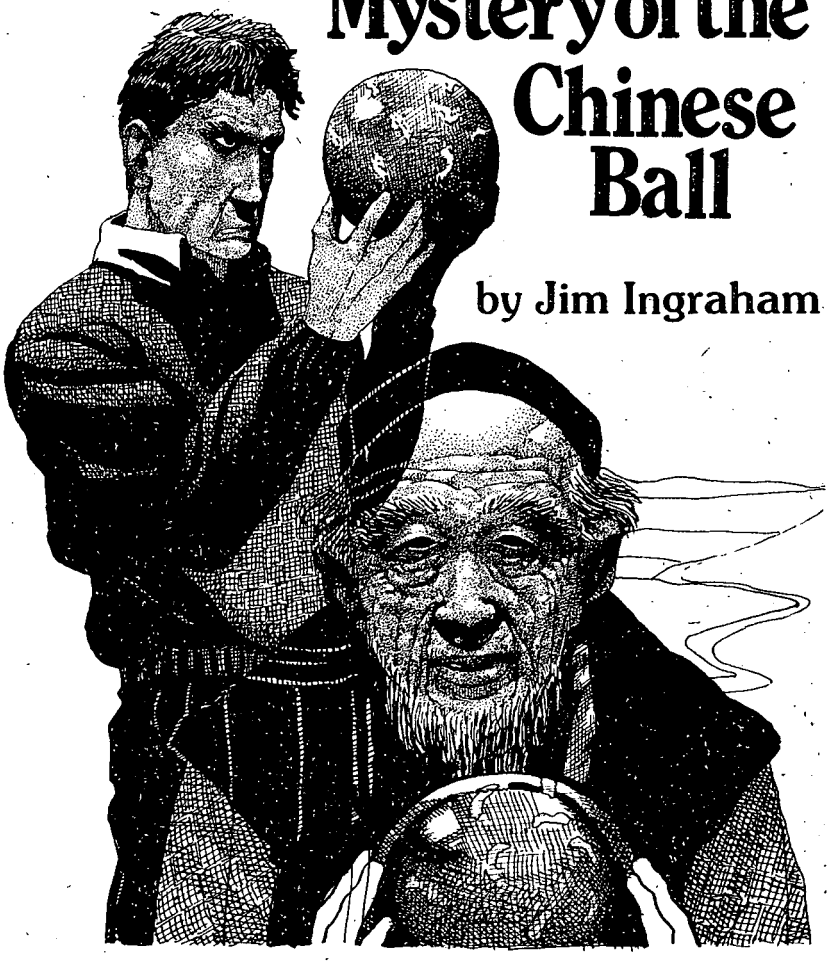
"I could never cook like this," Mona says, tasting his stew again. "I could never get the spices right. As far as I'm concerned, you can be in charge of the kitchen forever."

Important Notice to Subscribers: All subscription orders and mail regarding subscriptions should be sent to P.O. Box 1932, Marion, O. 43305. For change of address, please advise 6 to 8 weeks before moving. Send us your current mailing label with new address.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Mystery of the Chinese Ball

by Jim Ingraham



Byron Walnut, Special Consulting Department Manager of Scientific Efficiency Corporation, stopped his 1978 Chevrolet seventeen inches from the two-by-fours at the end of his garage. He gathered up his folded turtleneck sweater, his commodore's cap and lunchbasket; and after closing the garage door and noticing that the cat had spilled milk from its saucer, he

Illustration by Janet Aulisio

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

marched into the kitchen of his tidy Cape Cod house in a seaport village in southern Massachusetts and yelled, "Greetings, everyone, I'm home!"

"At exactly five, as you promised!" exclaimed his wife, rushing through the door to kiss him.

"Exactly," he said, as though it could not have been otherwise. "And before supper is ready, I have ten minutes to wash up and shave, seven minutes to water the marigolds, five minutes to dampen the driveway and put the hose away, and luckily," he added, "I have three minutes remaining to clean up the milk spilled by Fletcher. You see how we prepare for the unforeseen?" And for punctuation he tapped his forefinger on his wife's long nose.

When he went into the living room, he noticed, with vexation, that his mother had moved her rocking chair from where he had placed it. She was not wearing the blue afghan he had given her. And she was reading a book of poetry, an occupation he considered neurotic.

"And how are you, Winifred Alice?" he asked.

"Just fine, Byron. I have a surprise for you."

Annoyance narrowed Byron's eyes as he watched the happy old lady go into the little foyer that led to the front entrance of the house. In a few minutes she came back carrying a large square box, which she set heavily on the lowered front of the Winthrop desk.

"At last we have received the legacy of the Reverend Lee!" she said, smiling happily.

"Well, open it up," Byron said.

"I don't have to. I know what it is."

"You surmise. You don't know."

"I know," said Winifred Alice. "Dear Reverend Lee owned only one thing I wanted, and he was a man who knew what people wanted—God rest his lovely Christian soul."

"He gave it—whatever it is—to all of us," Byron reminded her. And without wasting another moment on chitchat, he stripped the paper from the package, broke open the cardboard container, and lifted out what appeared at first glance to be a bowling ball. It was a blue porcelain sphere decorated with tiny inlaid brass designs. It was seated firmly in a plain brass stand.

"What the devil is it?" Byron said.

"Exactly what I knew it would be!" exclaimed Winifred Alice, so delighted she clapped her tiny hands.

"But what is it?" echoed Hortense.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"It doesn't have a name," Byron said.

He carried the object to the window and inspected it, turning it rapidly in his quick hands, his mind racking through categories of round things.

"It's a decoration," he said finally, setting it back on the desk.

"No, it's not! The Reverend Lee would not have kept a decoration in that monk's cell of his for thirty years."

"Then what is it?"

"He didn't tell me."

"But it must be something!"

"Of course it's something," Winifred Alice said. "Now let me see."

Her gaze traveled about the room until it settled on the mantel.

"Just the place for it!" And she lifted the heavy globe and set it beside the wooden clock over the fireplace. "Now we can see it every day of our lives!"

Byron strongly objected to its being in such a conspicuous place. But the house belonged to his mother.

"What did Reverend Lee say about it?"

Actually, since the day the will was read, Byron had expected their bequest to be something trivial and unfunctional. The Reverend Joseph Lee was a strange and impractical man. One time, for example, he was given an expensive woolen coat by his congregation because the coat he had worn since anyone could remember was in tatters. And in less than a week, one winter evening a hobo came to his door, and the old minister, with typical disregard for value, gave him the new coat when he could as easily have given him the old one.

"Very little," Winifred Alice said. "That time Reverend Lee was sick and I was permitted to visit him in his room, the dear heart talked about his missionary days in China. And he said that an old Chinese man had walked a hundred miles through the mountains to give it to him."

"But didn't he explain what it was?"

"He didn't have to," Winifred Alice said.

"What do you mean he didn't have to?"

"You wouldn't understand, Byron," she said. She turned her rocking chair from the window and sat down and gazed quietly at the blue sphere on the mantel.

At suppertime not a word was said about the blue object. After supper Byron performed his evening chores according to schedule: replacing the washer on the outdoor faucet, trimming the long strands of grass near the driveway, repairing a loose shutter on

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the bedroom window, sweeping off the sidewalk. He timed all of these activities with his stopwatch and made notes in his black pad for future reference.

The discipline of forty-five years prohibited any thoughts unrelated to the job at hand from creeping into his mind. But in an elusive pocket of his brain he kept picturing the blue sphere impudently and triumphantly perched on the mantel. He had no idea why it irritated him. If it wasn't a decoration—and he had grudgingly conceded that keeping a mere decoration for thirty years was inconsistent with Reverend Lee's character—then it was something equally useless. What possible function would there be for a porcelain ball?

Just before bedtime, having become severely annoyed by the mocking smile that hovered impertinently on Winifred Alice's lips all evening, Byron ventured another question.

"Did Reverend Lee know this Chinese man?"

"He had never seen him before in his life."

"You mean out of a clear sky an old man trudged a hundred miles across the mountains to give him this—whatever-it-is?"

"Not entirely. Reverend Lee had rescued this man's grandson from thieves and had nursed him back to health."

"Then this was a payment?"

"Now you know Reverend Lee would never accept payment for an act of Christian charity. But why does it bother you so?" she added, with a curious smile.

"It doesn't bother me," Byron said.

"But why did he give it to us?" Hortense asked, hesitantly.

"The dear heart had reasons for everything he did," Winifred Alice remarked.

"Rot," said Byron. And he promptly went upstairs to his room.

On Sunday morning, while Hortense and Winifred Alice were at church, and in the afternoon, while Winifred Alice was napping, Byron stood at the mantel examining every inch of the porcelain sphere. He traced the tiny brass designs, searching for a repetition of pattern that might indicate a cipher. But the designs were obviously meaningless. He lifted the globe and shook it vigorously. He smelled it and put his ear to it. But he could detect nothing in it or about it that gave him any clue to its utility.

He pictured Reverend Lee—a tired old man with huge wrinkles in his face and watery blue eyes, a stoop-shouldered old man with hard fingernails and peculiar scars on his knuckles, a gently smiling old man whose sermons were meaninglessly filled with poetry

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and other trivia. He tried to picture the old man in his room kneeling at his cot, standing in front of his mirrorless dresser, walking back and forth in front of the blue porcelain sphere. But there was no answer in the image.

On Monday, while he was showing a department store clerk how to take garters more efficiently off a mannequin, his mind dwelled on the blue globe. On Tuesday, while he was trying to convince an undertaker's secretary that paperclips with notches in them are more efficient than smooth ones, the horrid Chinese thing rolled across his mind. On Wednesday, while he was overseeing the removal of water coolers from a sailmaker's warehouse, his mind crawled over the tiny brass designs in the blue porcelain. On Thursday he consulted an expert.

Roger Henderson Henderson, curator of the museum of art, informed Byron, when the latter marched into his office, that although he had been a student of Chinese gimcracks for sixty-seven years, he had never heard of anything resembling what Byron described.

"But maybe it isn't a gimcrack," Byron said.

"If it isn't," remarked the curator, "then it has utilitarian value and doesn't come within the scope of my considerable learning."

Byron went straight from Henderson Henderson to Random Updyke, chairman of the reference division at the public library. With Updyke peering over his shoulder, Byron searched through fifty volumes on Chinese art objects and found nothing.

"I'd say that what you have on your mantel is unique," Updyke told him.

And Bryon went home with a headache.

"I notice that you've been restless these past few nights," Hortense ventured the following morning, while Byron was counting the seeds in his orange juice and making a notation in his pad.

"That's because an unusually high pressure area has moved up from the Gulf of Mexico," Byron said.

"Good morning!" remarked Winifred Alice, coming cheerily into the kitchen with a yellow watering can. "Isn't it a lovely day!"

"According to the weather bureau calculations, it's going to be dry and hot."

"Well, right now it's just lovely," she said, nuzzling the spout of her can into the green leaves of a philodendron on the windowsill. "And, as Reverend Lee used to say, 'Think not on the future, for the future cometh not.' "

"It's been suggested to me," Byron remarked, watching her move

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

from plant to plant like a hummingbird, "that perhaps Reverend Lee absorbed too many Chinese ideas when he was in the Orient."

"Now, Byron, you know very well that Reverend Lee was thoroughly Christian."

"Then what is it?" Byron said, his voice a trifle more strident than he had intended.

"I told you, dear heart, to stop worrying about it."

"I'm not worrying about it. But if it's going to sit on my mantel, I want to know what it is."

"Why?"

Byron stared at her. "Now, that's the most idiotic question I've ever heard in my life!"

That evening he spoke hardly a word to Winifred Alice, although she quoted several pages of poetry to him. He sat in his vibrator chair reading his *Britannica,* and every time he turned a page, he scowled at the blue globe on the mantel.

Although he paid strict attention to what his eyes were reading, his mind, like a silent robber, probed through an undergrowth of ideas and observations about Reverend Lee and the legacy.

So unaccustomed was his mind to having two unrelated paths of thought simultaneously traced through it that he developed, before the evening was out, a nagging headache. For an hour after he had gone to bed, he lay with his head rammed into his pillow gazing out the window at a large cloudy moon that looked exactly like the Chinese ball.

"Are you awake, dear?" his wife whispered.

Byron rolled to his side and buried his face in the pillow.

"You know, I've been thinking," Hortense said. "Do you suppose there's something in it? A jewel, maybe?"

Byron didn't say a word. But his eyes shot open.

Of course!

That would explain everything. The Reverend Lee had brought the porcelain ball from China because it contained a fortune. He hadn't opened it because his principles forbade his touching material wealth. He had not given it away because he had not wanted to offend the memory of the Chinese grandfather. And he had bequeathed it to Byron because no other mortal in the parish was intelligent enough to solve its riddle. Because the Chinese grandfather had foreseen the ethical difficulty of Reverend Lee's possessing a valuable jewel, he had enclosed it in a sealed sphere so that the Reverend could always pretend he had been given nothing but a worthless ball. And he had kept it always at the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

foot of his bed to remind himself of temptation.

"It's perfect!"

"What is, dear?" said Hortense.

"Nothing." And Byron rolled over on his back and smiled his way into sleep.

In the morning when Winifred Alice came with her watering can into the kitchen, Byron greeted her with a collegiate smile. The commodore's cap and the turtleneck sweater were under his arm. His lunch basket was packed.

"You're going sailing?"

"It's Saturday morning." Byron said. "And nothing is changed in the Walnut household."

"You seem like your old self," she said.

"I was never anything but."

"Will you be here when we get back from Aunt Wilma's?" Hortense said.

"Like General Wainwright, I'll be here when the battle is over," Byron said, wittily. And he tapped her long nose and marched out of the room.

But instead of going to the seashore he drove around the block and parked opposite a small grove of apple trees through which he could keep watch on his front door. Twenty minutes after Hortense and Winifred Alice left the house, Byron drove around the block and pulled into his driveway. In a moment, with the porcelain sphere on the seat beside him, he was steering down the highway toward the city. He drove to Wendelshaeffer's Machine Shop on Franklin Street and, carrying the porcelain sphere under his arm, went inside the large, well-lighted building, which was filled with precision cutting tools.

"I want it cut so that no one will know it's been opened," he told the short, bald-headed proprietor, who clutched the Chinese ball in stubby, blackened fingers.

"Impossible," said Mr. Wendelshaeffer.

"Nothing is impossible," said Byron.

"What you want is."

"Then I'll go somewhere else." And Bryon snatched the globe from the stubby hands and marched out of the building.

At Willy's glass cutter's shop on High Street, Byron was told the same thing.

"Impossible," said Willy, tracing his rough fingers over the brass designs.

Byron grabbed the ball from Willy's hands and marched angrily

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

out of the shop. He tried three more glass cutters and four more machine shops, but he was given the same answer.

"I could slice it in half for you," said the last man he consulted. "I could pick out the porcelain chip by chip. I could heave it against the floor and get whatever's in there out for you. But I couldn't do it so's nobody couldn't tell. Now that's the way it is."

"That's *not* the way it is," Byron said. And he got back into his car and drove straight home and carried the ball into his cellar.

Placing the Chinese globe under the strong light on his workbench, he sat on his high stool and examined every inch of it. There wasn't a crack or a blemish in the porcelain. He held the ball to his ear and tapped it lightly with an improvised mallet, but he could detect no variation in resonance that would betray a thickening in the porcelain. After an hour he admitted that it was impossible to penetrate the sphere without destroying it.

In a fit of anger he shook the globe, as though it were alive and he was trying to throttle it. But nothing came loose inside. There was no rattle, no revealing sound. There was only the round ball—silent, enigmatic, hideous—clutched in his hands. He was glaring at it with hatred when he heard footsteps on the front walk. He leaped from the bench and hurried upstairs and managed to set the ball on the mantel just as Hortense and Winifred Alice came through the foyer.

All day Sunday he ignored the Chinese ball. On Monday he plunged into the development of an automatic sorting and wrapping system for a large commercial laundry, staying in his office two hours longer than usual. When he finally came home, Hortense stared at him as though he had contracted chicken pox. In their eighteen years of marriage, it was the first time he had failed to eat supper on schedule.

That evening, although he sat in his vibrator chair facing the mantel, Byron did not once look at the Chinese globe. He knew what it was. He knew finally and forever what it was. It was a jewel case. It no longer interested him. It was not worthy of his attention. He had more important things to think about.

That night he dreamed he was being chased by a Chinese grandfather across a plain of dead trees from the branches of which hung limp stopwatches. The Chinese grandfather multiplied into a thousand Chinese grandfathers, all of whom became dive bombers that swooped over him and hurled huge blue balls at him that shattered into a thousand fragments when they struck the ground. Panic-stricken, he darted through the trees and reached frantically for

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the stopwatches, as though they could save him, but they grinned and twisted away and rolled across the plain in shrieking laughter.

He woke up, bathed in sweat, with Hortense in her nightgown hovering over him.

"Byron, Byron!"

He threw himself on his stomach and pulled the pillow over his head and angrily told her to go back to sleep.

In the morning Hortense tiptoed nervously about the kitchen. Byron picked seeds out of his orange juice and dropped them, uncounted, on the plate beside his poached egg dish. Winifred Alice, in a long yellow robe, tripped into the kitchen reciting, " 'Blessed are the ignorant of Time . . .' "

Without a glance at his mother, without finishing his poached egg, Byron scraped back his chair, and without kissing Hortense or tapping her long nose, he grabbed his hat off the counter and stalked out of the kitchen. On his way through the garage, he kicked Fletcher's milk saucer halfway down the driveway.

Five minutes after he arrived at his office, he was called before the vice-president in charge of trouble-shooting.

"What's been on your mind lately, Walnut?" said the huge man.

"My mind, sir?"

"You have one, don't you?"

Byron turned livid with anger.

"Are you responsible for the new sorting and wrapping system at the Happy Heart Laundry?"

Byron nodded.

"This morning one hundred dozen diapers were delivered to St. Anthony's monastery."

Byron jumped.

"Either you made an error," said the big man, "or the bishop did when he built that place."

"I made an error?"

"I'll tell my bouncing kidney you did. Now you go right down to Happy Heart."

Byron marched out of the office in a rage.

When he got home that evening, he glared at Hortense as an angry king might glare at a grinning lackey.

"I want supper as soon as possible," he said, and he marched straight upstairs to his room where he sat at his desk and drummed his fingers until supper was ready.

After supper he was so nervous he spent only ten minutes in his vibrator chair. He went into the back yard and ripped five pickets

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

off the fence, made new ones, nailed them up, and painted them. He stayed out until it was dark. Then he went into the cellar and cleaned every paintbrush he could find. It was eleven fifteen before he went upstairs. Winifred Alice had gone to bed.

"Your cocoa's ready, Byron."

"I don't want any," he said. And without another word he marched past his wife and went upstairs to his room.

When Hortense came into the room, Byron was in bed with the covers over his face.

"Byron . . . ?"

He rolled angrily onto his stomach and shoved his head under the pillow.

Only after the light was snapped off and he heard Hortense crawl into her bed did he lift the pillow and prop his head on it. He knew she was awake. He knew she wanted to talk to him. But he had no intention of talking. He knew what he was going to do, and she and Winifred Alice could question him until Judgment Day and he would never explain himself. They could think what they wanted. He was master in this house.

A few minutes after midnight, Hortense having finally gone to sleep, Byron lifted the covers and cautiously slipped out of bed. With his robe and slippers in his hand, he tiptoed across the room, opened the door, and went into the hall. He waited a second, making sure Hortense hadn't awakened; then he stole quietly downstairs. He snapped on the living room light and gazed quietly at the blue Chinese sphere. He put on his slippers and robe, listened for sounds from Winifred Alice's room, then walked slowly across the floor, lifted the sphere off the mantel, and carried it into the cellar.

He set it on the bench and stood back and gazed at it. A thin, nervous smile flitted over his lips. He drew the robe-string tight about his waist and slowly rubbed the sweat off his hands and down his robe. He took a step toward the globe, put out his hand, and as though it were the head of a child, he stroked it. He stroked it three or four times. Then he cuffed it. It moved along the bench and he cuffed it again. A little laugh escaped him and he cuffed it harder. Then he slapped it, and it fell over and rolled to the edge.

He picked it up and set it on the center of the bench. He stroked it again. A floor timber creaked above him. He paused, fright rushing to his face. But the sound was nothing.

He rubbed his hands down his thighs. He walked about the cellar until he found the bundle of burlap sacks that he used for protecting the shrubbery in winter. He carried the sacks to the bench and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

carefully laid them over the sphere.

He picked up the sphere, wrapped in layers of burlap, and carried it into the farthest corner from the stairs. He knelt, listened until he was certain that no one was awake. Then he lifted the ball over his head and smashed it with all his strength on the concrete floor.

It made more sound than he had expected. For a moment he cowered with trembling hands and listened for sounds in the house. But he heard nothing.

Carefully he picked off the layers of burlap. It was dark in the corner, and he went to the bench and got a flashlight. On hands and knees, his fingers shaking, he searched through the broken porcelain and the thin fragments of clay and twisted wire.

The ball had contained nothing.

He quickly picked up every scrap of rubble and put it into a burlap sack and, like a thief, carried it out the bulkhead door. His feet clattered down the sidewalk as he hurried in his robe and slippers to the trash receptacle on the corner.

When he came back, panting like a spent runner, the living room light was on. He tiptoed across the dew-soaked grass and edged into the shrubbery and peered into the window. He saw no one. He had probably left the light on when he got the sphere off the mantel.

A few minutes later, having thoroughly swept the corner of the cellar floor, he slowly climbed the stairs into the little hallway off the kitchen.

It wasn't until he had snapped the cellar light off and closed the door that he saw Winifred Alice. She was sitting in the half-darkened kitchen watching him. She didn't say a word. For almost a minute she gazed at him. Then she got up and walked slowly into her room and closed the door.

Byron went upstairs and slid into bed. Although Hortense didn't budge or speak, he was sure she knew what he had done.

He stared into the darkness and tried to recapture the feeling of triumph with which he had carried the Chinese ball into the cellar and smashed it open. But there was no triumph. There was only the fear that had come over him when he had discovered that the ball was empty.

A terror gradually enclosed him in a chilling film of sweat. He had destroyed the ball and now there was nothing to measure or examine or weigh or hold in his hands. He had destroyed everything of the legacy except the question.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Someone Oughta

by Bill Bickel

Illustration by Nick Jainschigg

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

My first night in the new apartment, I heard him screaming and pounding the walls like a madman.

I looked at the clock—it was five twenty A.M., the sun was just beginning to appear, and I knew that even if he stopped right away, I'd be awake for the day.

He didn't.

Hard to believe it was coming from halfway down the hall, and I could imagine how his closer neighbors must have loved it.

I met one of them waiting for the elevator a few hours later. "You just moved into 14H yesterday?" he said. I told him I had, and we introduced ourselves. A pretty friendly building, I thought. Not like the last place I'd been.

My new friend from 14C nodded over at the apartment to the left of the elevator. "You hear 14A carrying on last night?"

"That's who it was?" I asked him.

"Guy moved in a couple of weeks ago. Likes to shout a lot, sometimes at people, sometimes just for the hell of it."

"Nice," I said. "Does he do it often? In the middle of the night, I mean."

"Didn't used to. Just the last few nights he started to." He shook his head. "Someone oughta do something about him."

"Can't you have him evicted, or something?"

"Not too easily. There are all sorts of procedures, and it takes a lot of time. Besides, you have to—"

The opening of a door lock echoed in the hallway, and the door to 14A opened up. The man who walked out was the quintessential slob: oversized in every direction, hair uncombed, an old T-shirt that didn't quite reach his waist, and the top of his shorts riding a couple of inches above his beltless pants.

He could have completed the effect by belching, but he obviously had no sense of the dramatic.

He walked toward the elevator, staring almost defiantly at my friend from 14C—the sort of stare only a brave man or a fool will meet.

Fourteen-C lowered his eyes.

When I got home that night, the lobby walls had been spray-painted with graffiti. So was the hallway on the fourteenth floor, and there was a swastika on the door of 14F.

Somebody had had a busy day.

There was a note slipped under my door, inviting me to a meeting in 14C at seven thirty.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I didn't recognize many of the faces, of course, but it was obvious that more than just the residents of the fourteenth floor were there.

Fourteen-C introduced me around, then got right to the point: "Obviously," he said, "we've got a problem here."

"Did anyone see the graffiti on the walls outside?" someone asked unnecessarily.

"The building never used to be like this," a tiny old woman to my right said to me.

"I know," I said.

"Never," she emphasized. "Do you know—Everybody, everybody, do you know what that nut in 14A did to me? Do you? He rear-ended me, right in the lobby."

"He what?" 14C asked her.

The old woman blushed a little.

"I told you what. He turned his back to me and dropped his pants. He thought it was the funniest thing in the world. I thought it was disgusting."

"Probably why he did it," 14C said. "Someone oughta do something about that guy."

"Like what?" the old woman asked. "Don't you think I went to the manager? And do you know what she told me? It could take months to get him out. Maybe more than months."

"M-my bedroom shares a w-wall with his l-l-living room," someone else said, "and I c-can't *wait* months."

"And that's assuming we can build a case against him."

"How about a petition?"

"I've got some good recording equipment," 14C said. "I could set it up by his door at night, record his screaming."

"You c-can do it b-better from my apartment."

"Even if you do record him, even if he doesn't find some lawyer who claims it's no evidence of anything, we're still talking about maybe half a year. If we're lucky."

"I've got to tell you the truth, I'm scared of him already. What do you think he'll do when he finds out we're having him evicted?"

The quality of life in the building continued to decline. Garbage was left in the elevator, and the fourteenth floor was serenaded for half an hour at a time at one A.M. one night, and a quarter to two the next. Not at all the following night, and I don't know about anybody else, but that kept me awake even longer, sort of waiting for the other shoe to drop.

He was obviously having an effect on more than just our floor. I was waiting in the lobby with another of the building's residents—I didn't know him,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

so we didn't speak. But when the elevator came and I pressed fourteen, he said, "Oh, you're on *his* floor."

"Yeah," I said.

"I don't know how you can stand it. You know, he scares me. I told my wife if she's getting on the elevator and he's there, not to get on. Tell you the truth, I wouldn't, either."

"I don't blame you," I said. "People keep saying someone oughta do something about him."

"You're right," he said. "You're right. I don't know what, but you're right."

There was another meeting in 14C that night. A big turnout, maybe thirty people. We were approaching lynch-mob strength.

A young woman living on the tenth floor said he'd threatened her. He passed her walking outside of the building, called her names, and said he'd beat her if she stood in his sunlight. "I don't even know what he was talking about," she told us through tears. "How could he say those things to me if I didn't even know what he was talking about?"

"I left work and took her to the police," her husband said. "Figured we could have him arrested. Cop said we could file a complaint against him for harassment, but they couldn't hold him for more than a day."

"Won't," somebody offered.

"And then what would happen?" the husband said. "What would we do, have to stay in our apartment forever?"

"What g-good would even *th-th-that* do? I l-live next to him, and I'm a-afraid he's going to c-come into my apartment."

"I don't understand," I said. "We've got locks. . . "

The threatened woman started crying anew, reminded now that she was less safe than she'd thought. Her husband held her closer.

"Locks in this building aren't worth much," 14C told me. "Good kick, maybe even a shove, and they're open."

"Then why haven't you ever . . . "

"Because we never *needed* stronger locks. We never *had* this sort of problem before. You can't understand that because you're new here, but this isn't the way we used to live." He paused for a moment. "Nobody should have to live like this. Someone oughta be able to do *something* about that guy."

I didn't say anything, but his attitude was beginning to really annoy me. Everybody's, in fact. Someone oughta do something. Always someone oughta, someone oughta. I wondered how long it would take before anybody would do anything but complain.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

It took, apparently, until a seven-year-old girl was chased down the street, fell, and broke her leg.

Fourteen-C was packed—not to the point of a rush-hour subway, perhaps, but I'd say at least half of the building was represented there: at least a hundred people, spilling into the kitchen and bedroom.

Which was perfect.

Everybody seemed to be talking at once:

"We can't go on like this."

"What's he gonna do next?"

"I had a new lock put on my door—"

"Me too, but I'm still afraid."

"We've got to do something. That's all, we've got to do something."

It was time. "Hello!" I called out. "Everybody, may I have your attention?" It took a few minutes. "Okay. Now, there might be a solution to our problem. A drastic solution, but I don't know if we have any alternative." Everybody agreed, and I had to wait for them to settle down again. "I don't know what I can do other than just say it: Up to a couple years ago, I earned my living carrying a gun." I removed it from the shoulder holster underneath my jacket.

Dead silence, followed by some nervous coughing. Most of these people had never seen a real gun before.

"You mean you used to be a night watchman?" the old lady who'd been mooned asked me.

I smiled at her. "Yeah. Yes, ma'am, that's what I mean."

I could swear a hundred people let out their breath at once. None of them believed I'd been a night watchman, but the tension was broken and we could get down to business.

"I can get rid of our friend across the hall." I raised the gun. "With this, one way or the other. I will either persuade him to leave immediately, or . . ." I didn't have to say anything else.

Some seemed squeamish about the idea. Most did not. "*Only* . . ." I said, regaining their attention. "I hate to mention it, you all being my neighbors, but I'm a professional doing this. Some of you might be doctors, and when you do a job, you expect payment. Lawyers, accountants, shopkeepers . . . well, it's the same with me."

Fourteen-C was the first to clear his throat and ask, "How much?"

"Ten thousand dollars," I told him.

"*Ten thousand?*"

"I'm a professional. That's the low end of the scale, I assure you. Look," I said, holding the gun out to him, "you want to take this and do the job yourself? Be my guest."

For a moment, I actually

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

thought he was going to take the gun from me, but then he backed away. "Listen," I said, "it might sound like a lot of money—it *is* a lot of money, but what do we have in here, a hundred people? That's one hundred dollars a family, less if other tenants pitch in."

Everybody began talking at once again, and I could see the arguments for me were stronger and more numerous than the ones against. I walked over to 14C and tapped him on the shoulder. "You all talk it over and let me know tomorrow, okay?" And then I left.

I knew I had them.

That late at night, it certainly would have been safe to go to his apartment, but I phoned him instead. Truth is, I never liked dealing with him face-to-face. He always had what you'd call an inner ugliness, a belief that his size and utter lack of caring about his fellow man made him somehow better than anybody else. It didn't.

"Yeah, who is it?" he asked, picking up the phone.

"Who is it," I repeated. "Who do you think it *could* be?"

He laughed as if this were the funniest thing he'd ever heard, and I wished I hadn't said it. Then he asked, "So? How did it go?"

"It went fine," I said. "God, did you have to break that little girl's leg?"

"Hey. Hey, I didn't break her leg. I chased her. She broke her own leg."

"And if she didn't fall?" I asked him.

"Hey, don't go wimp on me. You wanted those people desperate, I did it. Don't be telling me how and how not."

"Okay," I said.

"Because I do my end my way."

"I told you okay. All right, when I left them tonight, they were thinking about it. I'm sure they'll let me know tomorrow night, so get ready to be gone the day after."

"That soon?" he asked me.

"Yes," I said firmly. "That soon."

He agreed, but I couldn't help wondering what would happen if one time he said no.

A block and a half from the building, as I was coming up from the subway the following evening, the guy from 14C intercepted me. "Don't go home," he said.

"Why not? What's wrong?"

"There are cops all over the place, waiting for you. They found the body of the guy from 14A, shot to death."

"But I didn't kill him."

"Of course not," he said. "I did. But you told one hundred

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

people last night that you were going to, and that's pretty damning testimony."

"Wait a minute. Yeah, I offered to get rid of him. But *after* I got the ten thousand dollars."

"So?" he said. "You got overambitious. It's not as if you've ever run this kind of scam before, is it?"

I didn't say anything.

"Is it?" he repeated.

"How did you find out?"

"The recording stuff, remember? Just picked up his side of the phone call, but that was enough. Oh, did I mention I used your gun? You really should have gotten a stronger door lock, like the rest of us did. But of course, you weren't worried—"

"You're enjoying this, aren't you?"

"No," he said. "No, I'm not. But you were going to extort ten thousand dollars from my neighbors, and then go off and do the same thing in God knows how many other buildings, and I figured *someone* outghta do something about it . . . "

SOLUTION TO THE MARCH "UNSOLVED":

Cleopatra loves Julius.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

MYSTERY CLASSIC

The Great Cipher

by Melville Davisson Post

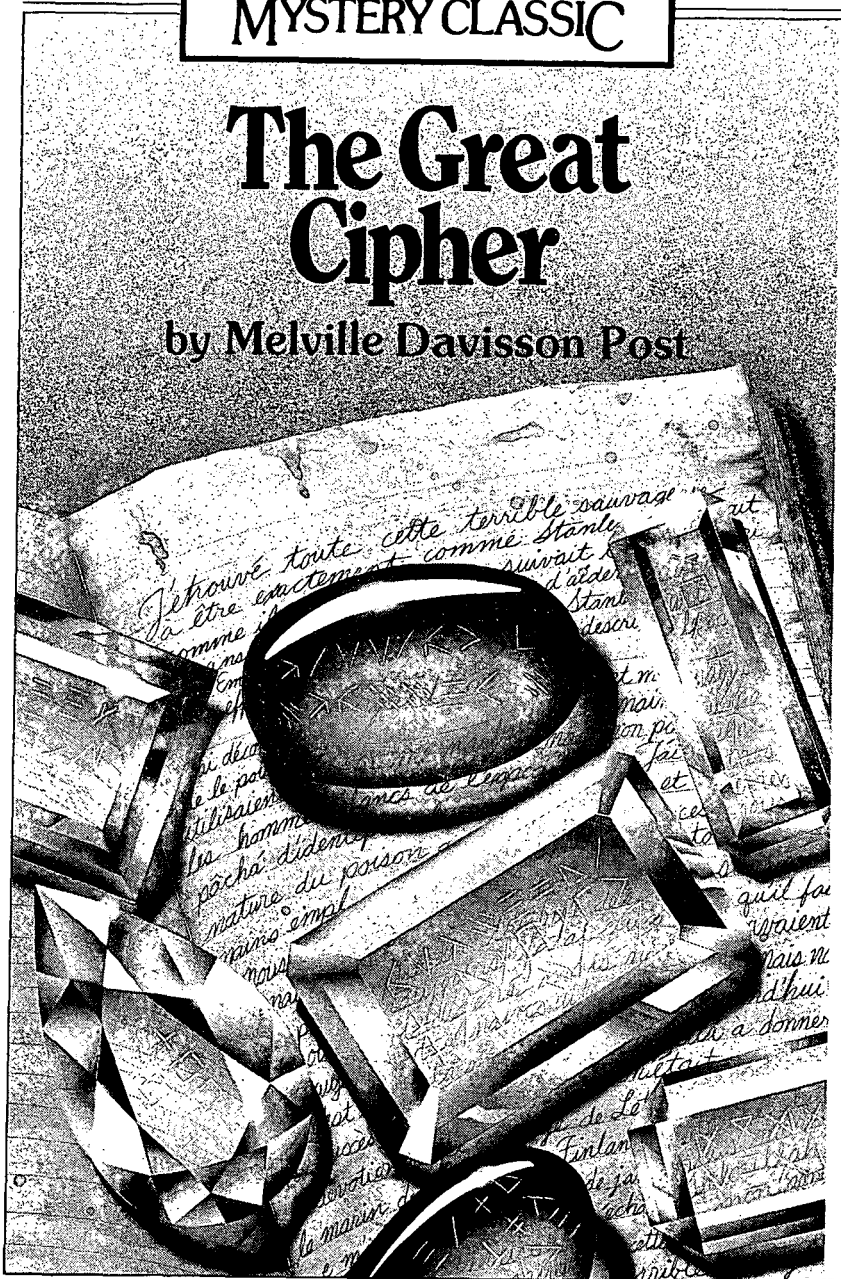


Illustration by William R. Warren

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

It was a night of illusions. The whole world was unreal. The city could not be seen. There was a sort of fairy vista extending over the gardens across the bit of park into the haze, pierced by the narrow white shaft of the National Monument extending into the sky.

There was a heavy odor of jessamine and honeysuckle lying about the south portico of the Executive Mansion. But there were no lights. The whole of the portico was in heavy shadow. A big, strong masculine voice, cultivated and firm, was speaking.

"I am glad that business of your embassy brought you to America, Monsieur Jonquelle," it said, "because I wanted to ask you about the last expedition of Chauvannes'. I knew Chauvannes in South Africa. He was a first-class man. What was the mystery about his death? The current report at the time could not have been the truth. It was too fantastic."

One might have made out the figure of the Frenchman by looking closely in the dim light. He sat in a long chair, his legs extended, a cigarette, unlighted, moving in his fingers. His voice was low and clear when he spoke, like one engaged with a reflection.

"It was all the truth, Excellency," he said, "as we now know."

The big voice interrupted: "That fantastic story!"

The Frenchman's voice did not change.

"The truth about it," he said, "is even more fantastic than the current story of the time. Nobody believed it. Nobody could have believed it. When his journal finally came in, everybody thought Chauvannes had gone mad before the end. The things he wrote down simply could not have happened!"

He paused. "But it was every word of truth. . . . There are the emeralds in the Louvre."

The big man beyond Monsieur Jonquelle, obscured by the thick shadow, made an exclamation of astonishment.

"The emeralds," he said, "are of course proof of the fact that Chauvannes found some evidences of the thing he was after. But his journal could not have been the truth. The man who wrote the closing pages of that journal must have been mad."

The Frenchman replied with no change in his voice.

"Excellency," he said, "the man who wrote the closing pages of that journal was not only sane, but he was so clever that I have never ceased to admire him. He was in a desperate position, from which, he knew perfectly well, there was no escape, and he undertook to do a thing that not only required the soundest intelli-

Copyright 1929 by Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc.; renewed © 1957 by The Estate of Melville Davisson Post. Reprinted from MONSIEUR JONQUELLE *by permission of Richard Curtis Associates, Inc.*
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

gence, but it also required a degree of cleverness that has not been equaled by anybody. I feel that I ought to stand and uncover whenever I think about Chauvannes."

There was a sound in the darkness as of one drawing one's body swiftly together in a chair. There was a sort of booming in the big voice.

"You amaze me!" it said. "Of course, I knew what Chauvannes was after. He used to talk about it when we were shooting on the Vaal. He had the clue, he thought, to a lost civilization of an immense age, in the great wilderness of Central Africa, a little north of the Congo. The old route of the ivory raiders had touched it. And there were the stories the slave traders had brought out, and so forth. I thought at the time that he was building on insufficient data, but one never knows what civilization may have flourished on any portion of the earth's surface. An immense wilderness laid down over it would mean nothing. The race is much older than we imagine."

He continued to speak in his strong, firm voice:

"I was not surprised that Chauvannes found some evidence of the thing he was looking for. He was a first-class archaeologist. He knew all about everything of the sort that had been uncovered. And he was a good, all-around explorer, none better. If there was any man in the world who could have gone from the Congo across the old trail of the ivory raiders, northeast to the Albert Nyanza, it was Chauvannes. I can believe that Chauvannes went in there, and that he found the evidences of the thing he was looking for; but the journal that the survivor of the expedition brought in could not be true. Chauvannes was insane when he wrote it—if the excerpts I saw of it were not colored. One could easily go mad at the end of an adventure like that. It was an appalling thing to undertake. That forest lies on the equator. It is very nearly three thousand miles across it. There is every conceivable peril in it. One would look for a man to come out on the Nyanza mad, if he ever did come out."

Monsieur Jonquelle replied in the same even voice.

"Our government, Excellency," he said, "was precisely of your opinion, when the journal finally came in. They thought Chauvannes was mad at the end. But he was not mad! He was sane and clever—how sane and how clever you will realize when you get the whole thing clearly in your mind. It was a long time before we understood it, although how we could have been so stupid seems

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to me now a greater wonder than the fantastic incidents with which Chauvannes filled the closing pages of his journal.

"I think the first clue we got was the method Chauvannes had taken to be sure that the journal would get into Paris after his death. His direction, written on the back of it, was that the bearer who brought it in should be paid five thousand francs by the executors of his estate. You see he was offering a reward for the thing to get in.

"Only one of the three men that Chauvannes constantly speaks of in his journal ever appeared. One can imagine what happened to the other two—the same thing, doubtless, that happened to all the persons who started with Chauvannes northeast to the Nyanza after he had abandoned his excavations."

The big man beyond Monsieur Jonquelle in the dark seemed to have composed himself to listen. He was silent, and Monsieur Jonquelle went on:

"These men, who were the only persons alive with Chauvannes when he finally reached the Ituri on the morning of the seventeenth of December, must have been three of the most desperate adventurers in the world. They were evidently broken men at the end of their tether, willing to stake everything on a last chance, or they would not have joined Chauvannes. They were not men he selected. He never would have selected men of this character. They seemed to have followed him in and to have literally annexed themselves to his expedition when he left the Congo east of the Leopold. They must have been an exquisite devil's guard—those three; the little wolf-faced Apache, Leturc; the Finn sailor; and the American beachcomber they called Captain Dix.

"The Apache was the one who came in with the journal. He must have been, after all, what you would call the 'best man' of the three. Nevertheless, it was these three hell birds who came out alive with Chauvannes. And what he had to say about them is on every page of the journal. He must have changed his mind very shortly after they joined him because the first impressions he wrote down, which were probably what our own would have been, were afterward scratched out. We might have believed that someone else had made these erasures but for the fact that the journal from this time on never fails to speak of these three men in the highest terms. Their tirelessness, their energy, their courage, their devotion to Chauvannes is the one note that continues through this journal to the end.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Of course, one could say that as these three men had to depend on Chauvannes to bring them out, the presence of a common peril would have united them in his support, and that while they were apparently exerting themselves for him, they were, in fact, laboring to get out of that wilderness alive.

"They were evidently densely ignorant persons of a low order. The Finn and the American beachcomber had no education whatever; Leturc could read—he was a deserter, we think, from the Foreign Legion—and he had a sort of devil's shrewdness. But he was no match, when it came to wits, for Chauvannes. None of them were. They were ignorant and superstitious. But they were determined, desperate to the last degree, and afraid of nothing.

"One of the features of the journal that first impressed me was the fact that Chauvannes had no illusions about these men. He understood each of them perfectly. He pinned the success of his great plan to an accurate conception of the Apache, Leturc. He thought this desperate human creature was what you would call the 'best man.' He expected him to come out the best man, and he laid the plan he had in mind to fit that eventuality. And he was right. I saw that when I got to thinking about the journal.

"And I saw something else. I saw that Chauvannes realized his own situation pretty early in the march of events. He knew what he was going into. And he knew where the thing would lead. He realized it a long way ahead. This fact, as I have said, was one of the conspicuous features of the journal. I suppose one, in an incipient madness, might realize all the accurate features of the situation that lay about Chauvannes, and before him, as he did; but I doubt it. I think only a man sound and sane could have seen it with the certainty that Chauvannes saw it, and at the distance beyond the event. Only the soundest intelligence, in the calm control of every faculty, could have realized that the thing before him was inevitable. A man in any other state of mind would have undertaken to delude himself. He would have resorted to futile devices, or to some tragic issue before the end, or to some vain hope. It took a mind like Chauvannes', profoundly sane, to see that the thing that awaited him was inevitable!

"I studied that journal as closely as a cipher dispatch. The evidences of Chauvannes' mental condition did not appear until the entries beginning about the seventeenth of December—the day on which they finally came out of the forest on the old elephant trail. Of course, strange things had happened before that—the decima-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tion of the force, for one thing. But Chauvannes never seemed to attribute this to any but a natural cause, a sort of united plan of the dwarf camps to destroy the members of the expedition.

"He found that whole, awful wilderness veined through with these camps, precisely as Stanley found it when he was following the Ituri in his effort to relieve Emin Pasha. And Chauvannes seems to have had precisely the same experiences as Stanley, in that the poisoned arrows, which the dwarf tribes used, were always fatal to the natives, but not to the white men of the expedition. At least, the three white men with Chauvannes, and the explorer himself, always escaped, while the persistent destruction of the other members of the expedition continued until only Chauvannes and the other white men came out alive.

"Chauvannes, like other men who have been into the Congo, tried to find out what the poison was that these dwarfs used, but he had no more success at it than Stanley. He thought the fact that white men did not die of this poison, as Stanley's expedition demonstrated, may have, perhaps, convinced these hostile tribes that a white man could not be so destroyed, and was the reason why they directed their attacks against the natives of the expedition and not against the four white men who conducted it. The explanation seems possible. It seemed intelligent to Chauvannes, for he makes it very clear in his journal that this is his belief. He gives it as the reason why all the members of the expedition finally perished except the four members of it who were white.

"The expedition was not large. It was as small as Chauvannes could get on with. He never intended it to be more than a scouting party, to lay out the thing he was looking for. The discovery of the emeralds was a sort of accident in removing the portion of an ancient wall that an uprooted tree had dislodged."

There was a moment's silence. Then Monsieur Jonquelle went on:

"Of course, the average person, accustomed to adventure tales, has a fantastic notion about these hostile natives. But there is in fact nothing fantastic about them. The whole of this immense forest, lying above the equator, is inhabited by these tribes, and their furtive attacks with poisoned weapons, usually at night, are well known to everybody. Stanley's whole expedition was constantly menaced by them. They are no fairy creatures of romance. They are a constantly menacing, actual peril in the Congo.

"Chauvannes saw nothing strange or mysterious about what

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

happened to the native members of his expedition. His journal is clear on that.

"I said a while ago that the incredible things set out in the journal did not begin to appear until about the seventeenth of December, when they had finally come out. It is true that some indicatory things are noted in the journal before that date. Chauvannes could not sleep. He returns again and again to this fact. Bromides did no good. He continues to complain about the failure of the bromides. He wonders if the drugs have lost their virtue, or if they could not have been pure. He notes that he tested this with one of the other men and observed the effect. The bromides were all right. This fact gave him a good deal of concern. He could not sleep. And the drugs upon which the medical profession depends in such a case, failed.

"We find this feature in considerable detail and beginning some time before December seventeenth while the expedition was still in the forest of the Congo, in its awful march to the northeast.

"It could have been nothing short of awful in every conception of the word. The whole of that vast wilderness is a kingdom of Satan. We never can get any adequate realization of it—a horror of gloom and rain, the heavens shut out nearly all the time by the treetops, the whole earth underneath a bog, every form of creeper, of vermin, of reptile, the stench of a rotten world, and this invisible enemy that never relented and never tired out. It was enough to break down the morale of anybody. No wonder Chauvannes couldn't sleep! But it never did break down his morale—that's precisely what I am going to make clear to you—not even when he saw, with an almost uncanny second sight, what was inevitably ahead of him.

"I don't know when it was that Chauvannes realized what was ahead of him, but as I have said, I think he saw it almost from the first day of the march north.

"I studied that journal word by word and sentence by sentence. I felt at the time that no one of us understood it, that the thing meant something which ought to appear if we were able to grasp a proper conception of it. I felt before it as I used to feel before those clever German dispatches, which appeared on their faces to be merely a narrative of a domestic incident, when they were in fact army orders containing a definite direction. I was right, as events proved, but the government authorities in Paris at the time considered my notion fantastic.

"Still, as I have said, the strange digressions in his journal did

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

not begin to appear until about the seventeenth of December, when they came out on to the great grass-covered plateau outlined to the east by a low mountain range, beneath which lay Lake Albert Nyanza. As it happened, they had come out ten days ahead of the date which they had determined upon for the arrival of the lake boat. It was to receive the expedition at the same point on the Nyanza that Stanley met Emin Pasha.

"Now, here was another indicatory point. They did not go ahead to the Nyanza as Stanley had done. They camped on a grassy slope—it looked like an English lawn, Chauvannes said—within the first day's march out of the forest. Here they remained.

"Chauvannes had all the modern implements that an explorer carries with him, and he laid down the exact location of this camp with the most painstaking accuracy. It was charted in the journal in half a dozen different forms and checked in every variety of way. He seemed to have spent a lot of time at this. He was determined that the exact spot of this camp should be definitely located for all time and beyond any possibility of error. And he did not fail. The exact location of that camp is as certain as any boundary monument on our Belgian frontier. It can be located today within the error of half a meter. He had plenty of time for this because he remained in this camp with Leturc while the other men went on to the Nyanza.

"The route to the lake could now be laid out to the eye. It was directly below a marked rocky promontory of the skyline. But the men with Chauvannes thought it better to be certain of the way out, and as they had to put in the time until the boat arrived, it seemed advisable to go over the route. The American beachcomber, Dix, and the Finn set out for the Albert, Leturc remaining in the camp with Chauvannes.

"Chauvannes seemed in the journal to take a certain care to justify this course. He was now alarmed about his condition. The camp was in a spot little less than heavenly after the awful forest of the Congo. It was a rolling country of bright green pasture land, veined with an outline of trees, its hilltops studded with thickets beyond which lay to the east the range of mountains rimming the Nyanza. It was simply a paradise after the horror of the vast wilderness to the southwest of it. Birds were everywhere. It was a glorious country, full of antelope, eland, buffalo and the like. It was no trouble for a hunter to supply a camp.

"It was here alone with Leturc that Chauvannes finished the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

journal, which I finally deciphered, as one might say, at the Service de la Sûreté in Paris.

"I have said that the only thing indicating Chauvannes' condition before the seventeenth of December, when they came out on the old elephant track into this heavenly country below the Albert, was the fact that he could not sleep and that the bromides had failed him. But this was not precisely all. The journal began to indicate a state of mind in Chauvannes that he apparently hesitated a long time to record, the impression that they were approaching some sort of creature of which they had very little, if any, dependable information.

"That statement seems vague, but the impression upon which it is founded in the journal is in itself vague. It was, to put it plainly, a feeling that some strange creatures were ahead of him. Now, one could have understood this, if it had been the feeling that these creatures were *following* the expedition, for the hostile dwarfs had, in fact, followed it until they had destroyed, as I have said, every member of the expedition except for the four white men. But it was not this peril that seemed to affect Chauvannes; this was a thing of which he was aware and which he could understand; but the vague fear of the creatures *on in front of him* was a new conception.

"Chauvannes said that he could not dismiss this impression and that it increased as he advanced, attaining to a definite certainty of apprehension at about the time they came out into the grassland west of the Albert.

"At first Chauvannes put this down as an illusion arising from the depression of insomnia. But he began to speak of it later as a sort of definite premonition to be reckoned with.

"Of course, when the journal first came into our possession, we took this, and the incredible things that followed, to be merely the illusions of a man whose nervous system had broken down. This was a profound error. Every statement following in the journal was, as it proved, of the most definite importance. One got here at this point in the journal a pretty clear conception of the condition of Chauvannes at the time.

"The three with him, whose care, devotion, and untiring solicitude are, as I have said, the persistent note of this latter part of Chauvannes' journal, were now very much concerned about him. They seemed to understand the danger, to himself, of one in such a mental state, for they secured and destroyed all the ammunition

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to the private weapons which Chauvannes carried; they even broke the blades of the knives. They appeared to realize that a homicidal seizure might develop from such a mental condition, and they seemed to fear that it might take the course of a suicidal mania. They were wholly without fear for themselves, as Chauvannes' journal repeats over and over again.

"It is here, now, at this point, that the whole journal of Chauvannes' begins to be taken up with the extraordinary things that he observed. The impression of some strange creatures close on the camp, in the neighborhood, became an obsession. One can tell that from the speculations with which the pages of the journal are filled at this point, as though the man were endeavoring to lay down an argument in order to support an impression which he felt certain was sound, but which he was also certain would appear fantastic to all other persons. Were men justified in the belief that the exceedingly narrow limits of their crude senses could give them a knowledge of all the creatures that might inhabit the world? He continues to reflect upon the limitation of the senses; the eye was easily deceived; the ear was wholly undependable; the sense of scent in a human being was absurd beside that of the most inferior animal, and all feeling was confined to a sense of touch infinitely crude. Was it not then ridiculous to assume, depending on such limited agencies, that one could have any large conception of what even the limited area of the world close about him contained?

"There are a dozen pages of this speculation closely written in the journal, following the insomnia and what we at first took to be the hallucination which possessed Chauvannes at the time. They bring us up to the strange events which he began now to set down in detail.

"This was all mental. It was all what one would call 'a state of mind.' The physical evidences began now to appear.

"It was on the first night in the new camp after they had emerged from the forest that Chauvannes had a sensation, as he puts it, of something delicately feeling over his face. It seemed to be a very slight, moving touch, as of the tip of a feather, but it was clearly distinguishable. The man put up his hand and made a swift gesture in the darkness about him, but there was absolutely nothing that he could touch. He says that this thing happened more than once in the night, and each time, although he put out his hand instantly, it came in contact with no physical evidences of any creature about him.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"This was before Dix and the Finn had set out to go over the route to the Albert. Chauvannes says that he spoke to the men 'guardedly,' as he puts it, about this experience on the day that followed it, but they had observed nothing. There had certainly been no sound in the tent; nor was there any track or evidence of the fact that any creature had been in it.

"The thing occurred again the next night. On this occasion Chauvannes distinctly felt that swift, lingering touch pass over his face; and again, instantly, he clutched about him in the dark, beating the whole place with his arms in a desperate effort to come into some physical contact with the creature. But it was wholly to no purpose. He touched nothing. There was no sound anywhere, and the men sleeping about him in the tent were not disturbed. He says that on the following morning he mentioned this thing again, but the three men with him had no experience of it whatever.

"If these creatures, of which Chauvannes had the strange premonitory sense, had finally appeared, they seemed to be directing their attentions exclusively to him. At any rate, the men denied having been disturbed by anything. They had seen nothing, felt nothing. But they were disturbed about Chauvannes.

"And it was on this day, it seems, that they took the precaution about his weapons. They also decided that the Frenchman Leturc should remain with Chauvannes all the time to see that nothing happened to him. The journal makes it clear that this precaution was taken, with the idea that Chauvannes in his present mental condition might do some injury to himself, rather than in the notion that he was menaced by any mysterious creature.

"And they followed that plan. Dix and the Finn set out to go to Albert Nyanza, and Leturc remained with Chauvannes.

"It was on the third night, after the two men had departed and he was alone in the tent with the sleeping Leturc, that Chauvannes saw this creature. He says it was about three o'clock in the morning. He had been awake through the entire night, his eyes usually closed. He does not know how he happened to open them, but he did open them. It was precisely seventeen minutes to three, by the watch which he wore on his wrist. He knew this because it was a night of full moon, the brilliant rays of which entered the tent through the half-opened flap. There was absolutely no sound to have attracted Chauvannes' attention, and no other physical evidence of the presence of the creature that he was at the time aware of. But at any rate, he opened his eyes practically at the moment

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

when the creature entered the tent—a thing it did without disturbing the flap and without making any sound whatever.

"Chauvannes says that he saw it distinctly. It paused for a moment after it had entered, remaining for some seconds quite motionless. He says that in proportion to the other parts of the creature's body, the head was enormous. It was cubical in contour. The outline was perfectly clear, but what we would call features were hardly distinguishable. The thing seemed to lack features. That was one of the distinguishing horrors of it—a head big in proportion to its body, cubical in outline and lacking features! The chest and the abdomen were also big, estimating the creature by its own proportions. The limbs were long, narrow and jointed. The whole creature was a repulsive, reddish color, and without any of the usual covering of animals with which the human race is familiar. The body seemed to be of some hard red substance, Chauvannes said—frozen, and polished flesh, after the skin had been removed, was the idea he got.

"The creature remained only a moment visible to him; then it disappeared. It seemed to Chauvannes that it disappeared merely by turning about. He was unable to see it again, although the doorway where it entered was clear in the moonlight, and there was only the grass floor of the tent."

Monsieur Jonquelle stopped here in his narrative, like one who would wish a hearer to grasp the whole conception of the story before he went on. But he did not seek a comment. The man beyond him waited for him to go on, and he presently continued:

"I shall not follow the detail of all the experiences noted down by Chauvannes, and which, finally, brought him to the conclusions at which he at length arrived. He was able, after this night, to observe the creature and a number of its companions, although the man Leturc, who was always with him, seems never to have observed it. Chauvannes got a profound impression of the creatures. They constantly gave him the idea of intelligence separated from any human feeling. He got also the impression that they were blind—at least in the sense that we understand blindness. That they had some other sense, which was equal, if not superior, to the sense we call sight, was, he thought, clearly evident.

"He was also able to discover, although he does not give all the details of that discovery in the journal, that these creatures lived underground, and that one of their underground cities was very close to the camp. He had, in fact, by some sinister hazard, put

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

down his camp almost at the doorway of the underground habitat of these extraordinary beings—if one could call a creature of this character a being in our sense.

"I suppose it was these conceptions of the *Thing* that caused Chauvannes to note in his journal a parallel in our modern fiction—the story of the Englishman Wells, about an underground creature, a degenerate of the human race, living in the darkness of a subterranean world and supporting itself on the flesh of the surface remnant of that race grown lovely and effeminate!

"Chauvannes in his journal did not draw a parallel. But he noted the details of this story, which he had read, as of something that occurred to him after he had actually discovered the creatures, of which he had come out of the forest of the Congo with that dominating premonition.

"Now, these are among the distinguishing incidents of Chauvannes' journal that led Your Excellency, and the Paris authorities, to believe that Chauvannes was mad. The culmination of events seemed to establish it.

"You know how the journal goes on, giving the minute details that Chauvannes observed during the week that he was alone with Leturc, while the American beachcomber, Dix, and the Finn made their journey to the Nyanza. And you know how Chauvannes finally came to the conclusion that the seven great emeralds, which he carried sewed up in the lining of his waistcoat, were the things that set these creatures on him.

"The emeralds are in the Louvre. They are seven of the most extraordinary jewels in the world. They are larger and purer than any other known emerald. They are cut in a manner of which we have no knowledge, and the backs of them are covered with a hieroglyphic writing that antedates any language that we know, and which, so far, has baffled every effort to translate.

"At any rate, although the Frenchman Leturc was with Chauvannes all the time—was, in fact, guarding him all the time—and although he was never at any time more than a dozen meters from the door of the tent, and although no sound was ever heard, no violence was ever offered to anything, no track was ever seen, no act was ever done of which Chauvannes had any knowledge, or the guard Leturc had any knowledge—in spite of all this, on the very day before the return of Dix and the Finn, the emeralds disappeared!

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Chauvannes wrote it down in detail in the journal.

"He was certain, accurate, without any trace of doubt; the emeralds—no longer in his possession—were in the underground habitat of these creatures! And the opening of this habitat was close beside the very place of the camp.

"It was hardly any wonder that the men with him considered him mad, especially when one reads the closing pages of the journal. He takes, in writing, an elaborate and tender farewell of the three men. He thanks them in detail for their courage, their unfailing kindness to him, and their devotion to the expedition. No man could have written a higher testimonial of the fidelity of his companions. He points out that his death is impending and certain. He begs that the journal may be carried to France, and he urges the French government to send out an expedition to recover the emeralds, which, he says are concealed in the first underground dwelling of the creatures, which he has described, as though he were aware of the fact that there were other dwellings of these creatures about. The emeralds are in the one closest to the camp, and they can be recovered! He is insistent on this point, as he is insistent on the fact that his death is near and inevitable, and as he is insistent on the fidelity of the three men with him.

"And when on the following day, as Leturc reported, he seized the Finn's rifle and shot himself, the men were, of course, convinced that he was mad."

There came a sudden vigor into Monsieur Jonquelle's voice.

"But he was not mad! Don't you see, Excellency, that the whole narrative of the journal was an immense cipher? Don't you see what the man was doing?"

The voice beyond Monsieur Jonquelle, in the darkness of the portico, boomed in a sudden big expletive. There was the sound of a doubled fist crashed into the palm of a hand.

"Wonderful!" he cried. "It's clever beyond words. Good God! Think of the man in that deadly position working out a clever thing like that. He knew what was going to happen to him. He knew it as soon as he picked up those jewels under the overturned stones on the Congo. He knew he would never come out alive, and he worked out the cipher in this journal to show where the emeralds were concealed, so the French authorities could recover them. And he worked out all the details to be sure that the journal would finally get into Paris. It's wonderful! It's amazing."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He beat his leg with his big hand, thumping it as one might thump grist in a bag.

"I never dreamed that that was what the man was after. I thought he was mad!"

"Surely," replied Monsieur Jonquelle. "It was the first impression of everybody. But he was not mad. He was merely making a great cipher with all the details of this journal—a cipher that would deceive the three men who had already killed off all the natives in his expedition, and who had determined to murder him after they were certain that they could reach the Albert Nyanza! A cipher that would so completely deceive them, by bearing on its face the proof of their innocence and of his own madness, that they would be careful to get it to the French authorities as a justification of themselves!

"He knew there was no chance that he would ever come out alive! But he wished to rob these assassins of the treasure which they coveted, and he wished the record of his expedition and these incomparable emeralds to reach France. He therefore prepared a journal in which was concealed, as in a code, all the actual facts connected with his expedition and his assassination, and at the same time would disclose the place in which the emeralds were concealed. It would also bring the assassins to that justice which they deserved. He foresaw that Dix and the Finn would assume that Leturc had stolen the emeralds. He knew that the Apache Frenchman was shrewder than these two, that he would realize their suspicion and that he would forestall it by their murder—a thing we know immediately happened after the assassination of Chauvannes on the morning of their return. This was established by the fragmentary confession of the Apache Leturc, shortly before he was executed."

Monsieur Jonquelle stopped.

"I maintain, Excellency, that this whole journal is the finest example of code writing that was ever undertaken in the world."

He paused. And his voice took on a note of profound courtesy.

"You know, Excellency, what the creature was that Chauvannes described, and where the emeralds were hidden?"

Again the big voice boomed.

"Surely," it cried. "Our conception of a thing depends on the manner in which it is described and the mental state which had been prepared to receive that description. It was the ant! The red ant! And the emeralds were concealed in the ant-heap nearest to the point where the camp was located!"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THERE'S MURDER, OF COURSE...

... and theft, betrayal, blackmail and card sharping. Plus intriguing clues: an odd penny in a dead man's fist, a set of postcards from an unknown aunt, and the mysterious word "mort." It's all in...

ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S

ANTHOLOGY

NO HARM UNDONE

30 stories—Hundreds of pages of mystery, suspense and intrigue by outstanding authors. Order your copy today for just $4.50.

☐ **YES!** Please rush my copy of Alfred Hitchcock's NO HARM UNDONE. I have enclosed my check or money order for $4.50.

NAME_____

ADDRESS_____

CITY_____ STATE____ ZIP_____

Mail To:
Hitchcock Anthologies
P.O. Box 999
Ridgefield, NJ 07657

Please allow 6 to 8 weeks for delivery. Available only in the U.S. DH06X

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

BOOKED & PRINTED

by Mary Cannon

Photo by Scott Davis

EARL W. EMERSON

It was the title of that first "Thomas Black Mystery" —*The Rainy City*— that caught my eye. It referred to Seattle, Washington, home of the ex-cop and current private investigator (and home to author Emerson, by the way). I had just been to Seattle on a visit, and I had liked what I'd seen. So I was predisposed to like the book.

And I wasn't disappointed. *The Rainy City* opened strongly with Black's narrative: "On Saturday some ghoul murdered my dog." No one—neither private eye Black, nor this reader—was surprised when matters became even more deadly later on. What was surprising was exactly *how* the plot was developed, and there was more than one surprise in store for readers in that area.

Those who appreciate the loner private eyes, the creations of authors Robert Parker and Loren Estleman, for example, should also welcome newcomer Thomas Black. Black retired from the local police force after ten years; his small pension allows him to survive without scrambling for cases. He drives a thirteen-year-old truck, owns a modest frame house in the university district, and rents out his basement apartment to a law student named Kathy, a woman with whom he shares a real but platonic friendship. His style is punchy and generally unsentimental, although Black is not a case-hardened fictional type.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

It is Kathy who sets him on a dangerous trail in *The Rainy City*. She is worried about a missing friend, and although the woman's husband seems unconcerned, Kathy has had a disturbing dream about her. Black knows from experience that Kathy's clairvoyance is no joke. After some satisfying sleuthing, Black solves the case; the ending is a shocker.

Poverty Bay was published hard on the heels of *The Rainy City;* in it, Kathy Birchfield is a recently graduated attorney and a new member of a prestigious Seattle law firm. The bad news for Black is that Kathy has just moved to comfier digs, and he's been missing her.

The good news is that she's now in a position to hire him, which she soon does. Black goes out to find young Lance Tyner, a flaky kid who has inherited fifteen million dollars from his grandfather; Kathy is representing the kid's father, brother, and sister, all of whom were cut out of the will but who hope to convince Lance to settle something on them. Black finds—and rescues—Lance, and expects to hear no more of him. Then a pretty, young black girl pleads with the detective until he agrees to work for her and once again seek Lance out: the girl, Lance's fiancée, is afraid something has happend to him.

Poverty Bay paints a pitiful picture of people reduced to living on the street while it tells a compelling tale of innocence and greed, loyalty and callousness, idealism and racism.

The most recent Thomas Black mystery is *Nervous Laughter,* proving that Emerson gets better with each book. There is again a case that involves Kathy's law firm: Black is hired to try to disprove the police theory that Mark Daniels, co-owner of a profitable dogfood plant, killed his young mistress and then fatally shot himself. If that is the truth, his wife Deanna stands to lose the sizable insurance payoff. Kathy represents Deanna, and Deanna is certain that something else must have happened.

Black is attracted to Deanna, which complicates the case. And then another young girl is found murdered. Several exciting scenes are filled with danger, and the characters continue to haunt us. But true to its title, *Nervous Laughter* is funnier than its predecessors. Black is more droll, and everyone else is wittier. Even the situations, though often deadly, are darkly comic. It's as if Black, who now has our attention and respect, has relaxed, is more "himself," less eager to please—and, consequently, more pleasing.

Seattle and its environs make a fresh backdrop for this new series. Thomas Black shares

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

some qualities with other beloved private eyes, but his temperament and narrative style are all his own. Plots couldn't be richer, more tightly constructed, or more surprising. An added bonus is that Avon Books is publishing Earl W. Emerson's detective novels as paperback originals, all with eye-catching jackets, sharing a $2.95 price. They're a real buy.

MYSTERY REVIEWS

Janwillem Van de Wetering and his Amsterdam Murder Brigade members were the subject of a profile in this column. Fans have recently had a special treat: **The Rattle Rat** (Pantheon, $14.95, 282 pp.) is newly published, as well as **Inspector Saito's Small Satori** (Putnam, $16.95, 189 pp.). *The Rattle Rat* joins us up with our old friends Grijpstra, de Gier, Cardoza, and the commissaris. This time they go to Friesland, an outer province, to solve the murder of a native who was murdered on a business trip to Amsterdam. For sheer audacity in plotting and refreshing characters, Van de Wetering is still one of the best. The other book is a collection of the cases of the young, hotshot Inspector Saito, a Kyoto detective who has appeared in the pages of AHMM. A fresh idea, engagingly rendered.

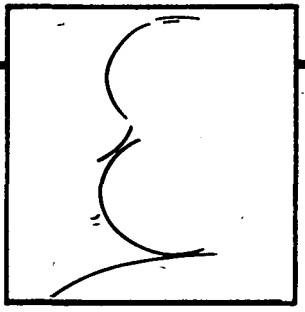
Fair Game is how a deadly assassin sees attractive Clare Randell, a San Francisco businesswoman who has had the misfortune to stumble on a successfully completed murder. Paula Gosling has written a real edge-of-the-seat thriller about two adults—Clare and the cop assigned to shield her—who find themselves falling in love when they should be thinking only of survival. The characters are grown-up and believable, and the suspense keeps building throughout, climaxing in a chase cinematic in its immediacy. (Popular Library, $2.95, 255 pp.)

"Uncle George" is back in Hugh Pentecost's **Murder Sweet & Sour** (Dodd, Mead, $12.95, 182 pp.). The peace of sleepy Lakeville in New England is shattered when George's sister is kidnapped, and the motive is clearly revenge. Obviously the answer lies in George's past, back in the days when he was a prominent D.A. and prosecutor, long before his self-induced retirement/exile. Uncle George fans won't want to miss this one, which sheds some light on his past.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

MURDER BY DIRECTION

by Peter Shaw



Young Sherlock Holmes provides an ideal opportunity to take a bright twelve-year-old with a budding interest in mystery to the movies. With or without having read Conan Doyle, the youngster will have little trouble catching the allusions in this extended speculation on how two schoolboys, John Watson and Sherlock Holmes, met and shared their first adventure. It all took place during an appropriately dark, Victorian middle of the nineteenth century at a London boarding school for boys. Here "Mr. Holmes," as he is addressed with due formality by his tutors, is already known as a genius. When the younger Watson arrives at the school, Holmes takes a liking to the bespectacled lad and they become great friends.

Soon an eccentric, retired tutor from the school—he is the uncle of lovely Elizabeth, with whom Holmes is in love—dies under mysterious circumstances, and the two boys and the niece are caught up in an intricate murder mystery.

Holmes has already noticed a connection between two recent deaths, in which perfectly contented men like the old tutor have either done themselves in or died in grotesque accidents. He had gone to young Inspector Lestrade with his suspicions, only to be (predictably) dismissed out of hand. Now Holmes and Watson must discover for themselves the modus operandi of the murders. As the audience knows, the instrument used is an intricately carved ivory blow pipe whose poisoned dart feels like nothing more than an insect bite but which induces maddening hallucinations leading to death.

But who is the hooded figure

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

with the blow gun? And what is the connection between the murders and the horrid Egyptian sacrifice of virgins secretly going forward in the lonely Wapping section of London?

That this is a Steven Spielberg production is evident from the E.T.-like creatures that dramatize each victim's blow gun-induced hallucinations. The adult with pre-teen in tow can accept these child-oriented inventions, along with the characterization of Elizabeth's dotty uncle, whose fussing over his pedal-driven flying machine is presented in the style of *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*. But a certain disappointment sets in when, starting with a failure to explain how the young Holmes traces the virgin-sacrificing sect to Wapping, pure action begins to dominate the characteristic ratiocination of the Conan Doyle stories.

Copyright © MCMLXXXV by Paramount Pictures Corporation and Amblin Entertainment, Inc.

Nicholas Rowe (left) and Alan Cox as Holmes and Watson in *The Young Sherlock Holmes*.

For enough of the way, though, *Young Sherlock Holmes* admirably captures the spirit of the period. Language, dress, and manners are all appropriately formal. And the mystique of the later Holmes is always in the air. The old professor leaves him a deerstalker cap, young Watson gives him a curved pipe, and Holmes himself at one point snatches up a cape. These references—obvious but also amusing and relatively sophisticated—are the stuff of first-rate children's entertainment. The magnifying glass and violin are worked in a bit more heavy-handedly, but are welcome all the same. As these familiar tokens appear—and mom, dad, aunt, uncle, or friend of the family knowingly explains them to the prospective Holmes fan—the usually pointless movie designation PG, for "parental guidance," can for once be said to apply in a meaningful way. Nor should anyone hesitate about guiding a young reader to the mystery genre. That form, with its logical processes and canny delving into character, affords an excellent introduction to literature and drama—and no better place to start than with *Young Sherlock Holmes*.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE STORY THAT WON

The December Mysterious Photograph contest (photo above) was won by Shirley Lawrence Steele of Grinnell, Iowa. Honorable mentions go to Victor L. Warzinski of Colliers, West Virginia; Theresa Jones of Cleveland, Ohio; Debra K. Robic of San Mateo, California; T. Glenn Roberts of Charleston, West Virginia; Janet E. Streilein of Johnstown, Pennsylvania; H. P. Stabbitz of Markham, Ontario, Canada; Karen R. Fechko of Barstow, California; John L. Reilly of Clearwater, Florida; Sara A. Fleming of Covington, Oklahoma; Ruth Leila Sagalow of Lake Worth, Florida; and Lauri Greenberg of Huntington Station, New York.

STRAIGHT FROM THE HORSE'S MOUTH
by Shirley Lawrence Steele

It all happened 'cause me and Ed called in sick to work and went to the cove fishin'.

We'd jest baited up when Ed spied the bottle. Well sir, he uncorked 'er expectin' a note when out popped this critter 'bout four inches tall, tol' Ed he had three wishes comin', then up and disappears.

Get a horse, I say. "No siree-bob, I'm wishin' for a gen-u-wine clipper ship," says Ed. Well, 'fore you could say bingo we wuz sailin' down the coast.

Toward dark, sirens started yelpin', and 'fore 'twas over, the shore peetrol had give ol' Ed a summons a mile long. That gen-u-wine clipper was missin' lotsa modern stuff. I tol' Ed he shoulda got a horse, they didn't need runnin' lites.

Ed's dander was up so he heads out to sea 'stead'a drydock.

Thunderheads started boilin' so I mentioned the horse again, and ol' Ed come unglued! "I wish I wuz a horse," he screamed. "I'd kick out *yer* runnin' lites!" Well, that was The Wrong Thing To Say.

'Bout the time Ed's two feet turned to four, I was flyin' over the rail with him follerin'.

So here we are, paddlin' 'round fifty miles from shore.

Ed's got two choices—die lika man or live lika horse. He's got horse sense, he'll wish for rescue. Trouble is, from now on I'll have to hear 'bout Ed's horse sense straight from the horse's mouth.

Photo © 1983 by Andy Summers. From THROB, published by William Morrow & Company, Inc.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

CLASSIFIED MARKET

AH-APRIL/86

ALFRED HITCHCOCK — published 13 times a year. CLASSIFIED AD rate is $2.35 per word — payable in advance — ($35.25 minimum). Capitalized words 40¢ per word additional.

ADDITIONAL INCOME

REFUNDING. $3.00 check or MO: Pops Information Company, P.O. Box 7095, Fort Lauderdale, FL 33338.

ART

MOVIE POSTERS: Vintage and "Current". Hitchcock, Sci-Fi, Mysteries: 1,000's available: ORDER IMMEDIATELY. (818) 980-1130. Catalog $2.00. Artistic Dimensions, 12115 Magnolia Blvd., North Hollywood, CA 91607.

BOOKS & PERIODICALS

FREE CATALOG. Used hardback mystery, crime and detective books. Steve Powell, Dept. DP, The Hideaway, Bar Harbor, Maine 04609.

READ "How to Write a Classified Ad That Pulls." Instructive booklet tells how to write an effective classified ad. Also includes certificates worth $2.00 toward a classified ad in any of our publications. For your copy send $2.25 (includes postage) to I.M. Bozoki, Davis Publications, Inc., 380 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017.

HARDBACK, paperback mysteries, $3 up. Send stamp. Detective-Mystery-Book search, P.O. Box 15460, Orlando, FL 32858-5460.

FREE LIST! Used Hardcover mystery and detective fiction. Dunn's Mysteries, Box 2544, Meriden, CT 06450.

WRITERS! "Telling Lies for Fun & Profit", $8. "Writing the Novel", $10. "Writing For Your Life" (new!), $10. "Affirmations for Writers" (tape), $12. Postpaid, guaranteed! LAWRENCE BLOCK, 3750 Estero #110, Fort Myers Beach, FL 33931.

MYSTERIES, THRILLERS. Used hardbacks and paperbacks. Write for free list. Time & Again Books, P.O. Box 13, Bedford, MA 01730.

100,000 science fiction and mystery paperbacks, magazines, hardcovers. Free catalogs! Pandora's, Box Z-54, Neche, ND 58265-0133.

BOOKS & PERIODICALS—Cont'd

PUBLISH YOUR BOOK! Join our successful authors. Publicity, advertising, beautiful books. All subjects invited. Send for fact-filled booklet and free manuscript report. Carlton Press, Dept. SMP, 11 West 32 Street, New York 10001.

FREE list used mysteries hardbound, paperback $2 up. Mystery Mansion, 915 N. Combee, Lakeland, FL 33801.

BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES

$1,000 Weekly Home Business Directory. Free Details. Name and address to: Box 1610-AH, Darien, Connecticut, 06820-1610.

STAY HOME! MAKE MONEY ADDRESSING ENVELOPES. VALUABLE GENUINE OFFER. 20¢. Write Lindco, 3636-DA Peterson Ave., Chicago, IL 60659.

"$1,000's WEEKLY!" MAILING LETTERS! FANTASTIC OPPORTUNITY! EXCITING FREE DETAILS! START IMMEDIATELY! WRITE: $UCCESS, #605-DPG, DRESHER, PA 19025.

SECOND INCOME · Stuffing Envelopes. Senoff Enterprises, M., 1589 Albion, Rexdale, Ontario M9V 1B6. Enclose a self-addressed envelope.

PERFECT HOME BUSINESS? No Inventory? No selling? Fantastic earnings sparetime. Free information: Income, Box 159, Sharpsville, PA 16150.

HUNDREDS WEEKLY. Spare Time. Retire Rich in three years. Free Details. MMI-D, Box 339, Mechanicsburg, PA 17055.

EARN UNLIMITED INCOME! NEW MLM METHOD OUTPAYS ALL OTHERS. OVER $10,000.00/MONTH! Terrence Roehrborn, Rt. 4, Kaukauna, Wis. 54130.

$5,000 monthly! "How-to" and business books. $1.00 catalog: Phillips Publications, 20063 Schaefer Dept. IO, Detroit, Mich. 48235.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

PLACE CLASSIFIED

AH-APRIL/86

To be included in the next issue please send order and remittance to I. M. Bozoki, Classified Ad Manager, DAVIS PUBLICATIONS, INC., 380 Lexington Ave., New York, N.Y. 10017.

BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES—Cont'd

BIG EARNINGS spare time. Retire Rich in three years. Free details. MMI-D, Box 1243, Mechanicsburg, PA 17055.

HOMEWORKERS! EARN 60¢ each envelope you address & return to us, according to instructions. Write: Distributors, Box 431-DP, Lynbrook, New York 11563.

$BIG BUCK$ $25,000 IN 60 DAYS! Amazing! Fantastic! Guaranteed! Send, Self stamped envelope: WENDYCO, 17057 Clark, Suite 607(IAE), Bellflower, Calif. 90706.

ATTENTION OPPORTUNITY SEEKERS! Big Money in home based businesses. FREE DETAILS: TCK International, 70 Constance Lane, Dept. DP-23, Northbrook, IL 60062.

TAKE PICTURES for profit. Try our unique methods. Write: Photomoney, 14589H West 32nd, Golden, CO 80401.

FANTASTIC "HOW-TO" BOOK. MAKE MONEY OPERATING YOUR OWN BUSINESS AT HOME. Send $24.95 To: Sunset Publishing, 9021 Fourth Avenue, Inglewood, CA 90305.

BUY IT WHOLESALE

400,000 BARGAINS Below Wholesale! Many Free! Liquidations...Closeouts...Job Lots...Single Samples. Free Details. Worldwide Bargainhunters, Box 730-IO, Holland, MI 49423.

EDUCATION & INSTRUCTION

UNIVERSITY DEGREES! Economical home study for Bachelor's, Masters, Doctorate. Prestigious faculty counsels for independent study and life experience credits. Free information—Richard Crews, M.D. (Harvard), President, Columbia Pacific University, 1415 Third St., Dept. 2M14, San Rafael, CA 94901; Toll Free: 800/227-1617, Ext. 480; California: 800/772-3545, Ext. 480.

WITCHCRAFT Occult Miracle Power Secrets Gavin and Yvonne Frost. Now accepting students. 1502-AN, Newbern, NC 28560.

EMPLOYMENT INFORMATION

OVERSEAS U.S. JOBS AVAILABLE. Unlimited Opportunities. Write for application. Employers, Box 3239-MY, Gulf Shores, AL 36542 or call 205-968-2500.

GIFTS THAT PLEASE

A gift sure to please—ISAAC ASIMOV's SCIENCE FICTION MAGAZINE, published monthly. Send $19.50 for 13 issues (includes shipping & postage) to Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine, P.O. Box 1933, Marion, OH 43305.

GOVERNMENT SURPLUS

"GOVERNMENT SURPLUS" JEEPS $30.00! 5,000,000 Items! Complete Information Your Area. 1986 OFFICIAL DIRECTORY. $3.00 (Guaranteed). SURPLUS, (B43), 4620 Wisconsin Northwest Washington, D.C. 20016.

THERE IS NO CHARGE FOR THE ZIP CODE: please use it when ordering merchandise from classified advertisements. You'll receive faster delivery.

HEALTH & BEAUTY

PARIS PERFUMES! Be Your Feminine Best. Eight Exciting Fragrances to Choose From. Send for Free Brochure. J.R., Box 81231, Lincoln, Nebraska 68501.

HYPNOTISM

FREE Catalog. Hypnotism, Hypnotic cassettes, sleep learning. Become the person you truly want to be. DLMH, Box 487, Anaheim, CA 92805.

INVENTIONS WANTED

EARN Royalties from your inventions or new product ideas. Nuprodux International, 1377 K St. NW, Suite 203, Washington, D.C. 20005.

JEWELRY

CLOSEOUT JEWELRY. 55¢ Dozen. 25¢ gets catalog. ROUSSELS, 107-310 Dow, Arlington, MA 02174-7199.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Classified Continued

LOANS BY MAIL

BORROW $25,000 "OVERNIGHT." Any purpose. Keep indefinitely! Free Report! Success Research, Box 19739-SP, Indianapolis, IN 46219.

VISA® Obtained Easily! Been Turned Down? Bankrupt? No Credit? No Problem! Write Immediately for Details! Credit-DP486, Box 2289, Sandusky, Ohio 44870.

SIGNATURE Cash Loans! Application Rushed! Plus the Most Exciting Financial Techniques to get you Cash! MBG-DP486, Box 2298, Sandusky, Ohio 44870.

MAILING LISTS

COMPUTERIZED-opportunity seekers. Adhesive labels. Guaranteed! deliverable! 500/$25; 1000/$40;. 5000/$175. Dealer's Co-Operative, 4158-I Calhoun, Gary, IN 46408. (219) 838-7099. Visa/Mastercard.

FRESH, HOT RESPONSIVE NAME LISTS of MAILORDER BUYERS. MOST categories. Computerized in ZIP CODE ORDER. Peel and Stick Labels. GUARANTEED DELIVERABLE! For Brochure RUSH SASE to: EMHCo, 131 Ohelo Ln., Honolulu, HI 96813.

MEMORY IMPROVEMENT

INSTANT MEMORY...NEW WAY TO REMEMBER. No memorization. Release your PHOTOGRAPHIC memory. Stop forgetting! FREE information. Institute of Advanced Thinking, 845DP, ViaLapaz, Pacific Palisades, CA 90272.

MISCELLANEOUS

OLD TIME RADIO. The best shows on reels or cassettes. Best quality, fastest service. Catalog $1.00: P.O. Box 3509, Lakeland, FL 33802.

READ "How to Write a Classified Ad That Pulls." Instructive booklet tells how to write an effective classified ad. Also includes certificates worth $2.00 toward a classified ad in any of our publications. For your copy send $2.25 (includes postage) to I.M. Bozoki, Davis Publications, Inc., 380 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017.

MONEYMAKING OPPORTUNITIES

CAN You stuff 1000 envelopes for $500.00 weekly? Send six 22¢ stamps. Blume, Box 460159, Garland, Texas 75046-0159.

LOTTERIES! Play by mail. Send $3.00 for information package. Star Service, P.O. Box 284, Chesterfield, MO 63017.

HYDRO-MAJIK, Amazing Product, Make Money! For home, business. Send $7.00 Now for trial order, details. Hydro Products, Box 8384-A, Greenville, SC 29604.

$15,000 MONTHLY possible mailing 20 letters a day. Free information. LAW, 55 Sutter, Suite 170, S.F., CA 94104.

$60.00 per Hundred securing-stuffing envelopes from home. Offer-details: Rush stamped self-addressed envelope. Imperial, P-460, X17410, Fort Lauderdale, FL 33318.

"HUNDREDS WEEKLY"! GUARANTEED PROCESSING $TAMPED ENVELOPES! $TART IMMEDIATELY! FREE DETAILS! WRITE: MJG-DPG, AMBLER, PA 19002.

GOOD MONEY! Weekly! Processing mail! Free Supplies, Postage! No Selling! Information? Rush stamped envelope! Foodmaster-DCM, Burnt Hills, NY 12027.

"1,000'S WEEKLY"! $ECURING/$TUFFING ENVELOPES! $TART IMMEDIATELY! FREE DETAILS! WRITE: ASSOCIATES, #210-DPG, MAPLE GLEN, PA 19002.

HUNDRED$ Weekly! Large Company needs homeworkers. Send self-addressed stamped envelope. Bloomington, Box 5938, Richardson, Texas 75083.

BU$INE$$ .CARD$ = CA$H!!! Wholesale To You! Huge Catalog! Raised Printing! Free Shipping! Unique and Recession Proof. Free Details and Samples! Jolyn, 4 Solow, East Northport, New York 11731.

YOU'LL MAKE MONEY

SAVE MONEY TOO— BY READING and ANSWERING THESE CLASSIFIED ADS

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Classified Continued

MONEYMAKING OPPORTUNITIES—Cont'd

EASY Business, earn $1,000's Weekly! Free details! Send Stamped Addressed Envelope: Todco, Dept. 3, 4219 W. Olive Ave., Burbank, CA 91505.

OF INTEREST TO ALL

VIDEO Mystery Movie Classics, free price list. Beta and VHS. House of Stewart, 341 Vanderbilt Ave., Staten Island, New York 10304.

READ "How to Write a Classified Ad That Pulls." Instructive booklet tells how to write an effective classified ad. Also includes certificates worth $2.00 toward a classified ad in any of our publications. For your copy send $2.25 (includes postage) to I.M. Bozoki, Davis Publications, Inc., 380 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017.

PERSONAL

SINGLE? Widowed? Divorced? Nationwide introductions! Refined, sincere people, 18-80. Identity, Box 315-DT, Royal Oak, Michigan 48068.

BEAUTIFUL GIRLS SEEK FRIENDSHIP AND MARRIAGE. American—Mexican—Philippine—European. Photo selection FREE! Latins, Box 1716-DD, Chula Vista, CA 92012..

ATTRACTIVE, DEVOTED Oriental ladies seeking correspondence, marriage. Dignified presentations by American-Asian couple. Asian Experience, Box 1214T, Novato, CA 94948.

PERSONAL—Cont'd

CHRISTIAN SINGLES OUTREACH. Local/Worldwide—Phone Mail Introductions. Free Information/Fast Service. Write: Box 9020-TM, Van Nuys, CA 91409.

SONGWRITERS

POEMS WANTED. Songs recorded and published. Radio-TV promotions. Broadway Music Productions, Box 7438-DA, Sarasota, FL 33578.

SONGWRITERS: Exciting offer! Poems, songs needed. Free evaluation. Creative Music Productions, Box 1943-A4, Houston, TX 77251-1943.

STAMP COLLECTING

30 WILD ANIMAL only 25¢ to introduce our Foreign Approvals. Weblor, 140A Elm, No. Reading, MA 01864.

TAPES & CASSETTES

OLDTIME radio programs. Mysteries, adventure, suspense, science fiction, comedies. Classic tapes. Free catalogue. Carl D. Froelich, Heritage Farm, New Freedom, PA 17349.

UNUSUAL BOOKS

THE INTELLIGENCE LIBRARY: Many unique books & official manuals on RESTRICTED subjects—Bugging, Wiretapping, Locksmithing, Covert Investigation, & MUCH MORE. Free brochures, MENTOR, DP, 135-53 No. Blvd., Flushing, N.Y. 11354.

For Greater Savings...Results...and Profits...

PLACE YOUR AD IN ONE OF OUR SPECIAL COMBINATIONS:
Combo #1, Combo #2, or Combo #3.

Each combination is designed to give your ad the largest audience available.

Each combination offers you a Special Discount Rate.
For further information write to I. M. Bozoki, Classified Ad Manager, Davis Publications, Inc., 380 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Be the judge and jury for just $1.

Get $155.40 worth of Best Selling Mysteries for $1.

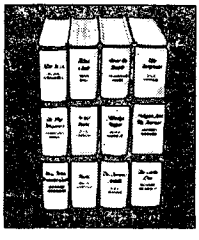
☑ **You get twelve full-length novels for $1.** ☑ **Select only the books you want.**
☑ **Save 60 to 80% off original publisher's prices.** ☑ **Pay no money in advance, ever.**

JUDGE FOR YOURSELF. Our mystery books are the best spine-tinglers anywhere. To introduce you to these gripping tales of suspense and intrigue, we're making this remarkable offer...For only $1, The Detective Book Club will send you these twelve full length novels, each a masterpiece of mystery. Bought separately, these twelve novels would cost you $155.40. For this special trial offer, all twelve are yours, in four handsome, hardcover triple-volumes as shown, for only $1 plus shipping. An incredible value.

SAVE 60-80%. As a member you are GUARANTEED a savings of 60-80% off original publisher's prices. That's a savings of at least $22 for each triple-volume you choose to own. And most importantly, you will select from only the best of the more-than-400 mysteries published yearly. Authors like Brian Garfield, Dick Francis and Hugh Pentecost. For any triple-volume you select, you pay just $9.95 plus shipping...that's only $3.32 for each easy-to-read, unabridged, full-length mystery.

There's No Mystery! There is no mystery to how our club works. Six times a year you will receive, free, the club's Previews describing upcoming selections. As a member, you may reject any volume before or after receiving it.

There is never a minimum number of books to buy, and you may return any unwanted selection within 21 days and owe nothing. And of course, you may cancel your membership at any time. As one of the oldest book clubs in America, we want you to be satisfied. Simply fill out the coupon and return it to: The Detective Book Club, Roslyn, NY 11576.



Please enroll me as a member and send me my four triple-volumes shown here, containing twelve mysteries. I enclose no money now. I'll examine them for one week, then will either accept all for $1 plus shipping, or return them and owe nothing.

As a member, I will receive, free, the club's monthly Preview which describes my next selections. I will always have at least 10 days to reject any volume by returning the form provided. I may return any book within 21 days and owe nothing. For each volume I keep, I'll send you $9.95 plus shipping. I may cancel my membership at any time. Satisfaction Guaranteed.

6-KU
D24M3V

THE DETECTIVE BOOK CLUB, Roslyn, NY 11576

Mr./Mrs./Ms. _____

Street _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

PUBLISHED BY
WALTER J. BLACK, INC.
ESTABLISHED 1923

Note: Members accepted in USA and Canada only. Offer slightly different in Canada.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The uneasy road of the great writer

Great writers may be born to be great writers, but that doesn't necessarily make it easy for them to make their way in the world.

First, someone has to discover them. Second, someone has to publish them, not once, but several times. Third, someone has to keep reminding them that they have something important on their minds and that there's a world out there waiting for them to put it on paper.

While some potentially great writers may succumb to the heartbreaks of rejection slips and resort to other ways of life as a result, others somehow summon the will to keep writing until someone gives them all the encouragement they need to go on.

The great writers of our time who have needed someone to urge them on include F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway, Booth Tarkington, Robert Frost, Theodore Dreiser, Sherwood Anderson, Katherine Anne Porter, P.G. Wodehouse, Willa Cather, Robert Benchley, J.D. Salinger, Dorothy Parker, Alexander Woollcott, Robert Penn Warren, James Thurber, Ogden Nash, S.J. Perelman, Norman Mailer, John Updike, Tom Wolfe, Philip Roth, John Irving, Saul Bellow and E.L. Doctorow.

The someone that all of those writers needed and found was, in every case, a magazine, for it was a magazine that published their work when the going was toughest and then cajoled and pestered them for more.

We don't know of a higher compliment that can be paid to people who read magazines, because it is they who persuade our editors that the world is indeed ready for people who have it in them to write the literature of our age from *The Great Gatsby* to *Ragtime*.

The readers of magazines have, in other words, a unique kinship with their editors. They not only cast their votes for or against in the form of newsstand sales and subscription renewals, they write their editors to tell them, in no uncertain terms, what they like or dislike about individual writers.

From time to time, some of our readers will reject a new writer on first reading, only to write again to say how wrong they were.

In some instances, they may have reread the first work. In others, they may have read a second or third. But in any case, the importance of the writer—whoever he or she may be—has grown on them.

Whenever we receive such letters, they aren't tucked away in a file until many people have read them, for we not only live to open the eyes of our readers, we live to have them open ours.

Nothing opens your eyes like a magazine.

This message is one in a series from America's magazines.

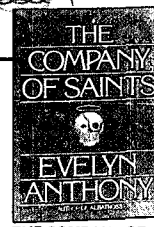
© 1982 Magazine Publishers Association, Inc. 575 Lexington Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10022

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

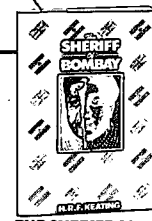
You're invited to the trial.

THE DEVIL'S NOVICE
by Ellis Peters
Mariet Aspley...aspiring monk or Satan's helper?
Pub. List $13.95

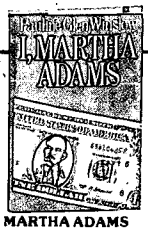
KILLED ON THE ICE
by William L. DeAndrea
A flagpole holds the key to a murder.
Pub. List $11.95



THE COMPANY OF SAINTS
by Evelyn Anthony
A secret assassination organization threatens the world.
Pub. List $15.95

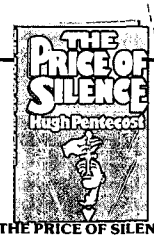


THE SHERIFF OF BOMBAY
by H.R.F. Keating
Are high officials immune from punishment?
Pub. List $11.95

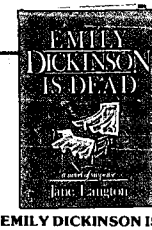


I, MARTHA ADAMS
by Pauline Glen Winslow
A suspenseful cross-country race to save America.
Pub. List $12.95

THE GARBAGE COLLECTOR
by Aaron Marc Stein
High society European romp with Matt Erridge and murder.
Pub. List $11.95



THE PRICE OF SILENCE
by Hugh Pentecost
The hunter now becomes the hunted.
Pub. List $12.95



EMILY DICKINSON IS DEAD
by Jane Langton
A centennial celebration unleashes arson, deceit and murder.
Pub. List $13.95

A LEGACY FROM TENERIFE
by Noah Webster
The Canary Islands contain a fortune worth killing for.
Pub. List $11.95

NECESSITY
by Brian Garfield
To live, Mattie LaCasse must "die."
Pub. List $13.95

A LOVELY DAY TO DIE
by Celia Fremlin
Thirteen choice mystery morsels to enjoy.
Pub. List $11.95

ROOT OF ALL EVIL
by E.X. Ferrars
Felicity Silvester's death foretold —prank or prophecy?
Pub. List $11.95

RECEIVE 12 MYSTERIES FOR JUST $1.

For details see last page.

THE DETECTIVE BOOK CLUB

LICENSED TO CURIOUS
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED